16th Year of Publication

Weird Tales

JUNE

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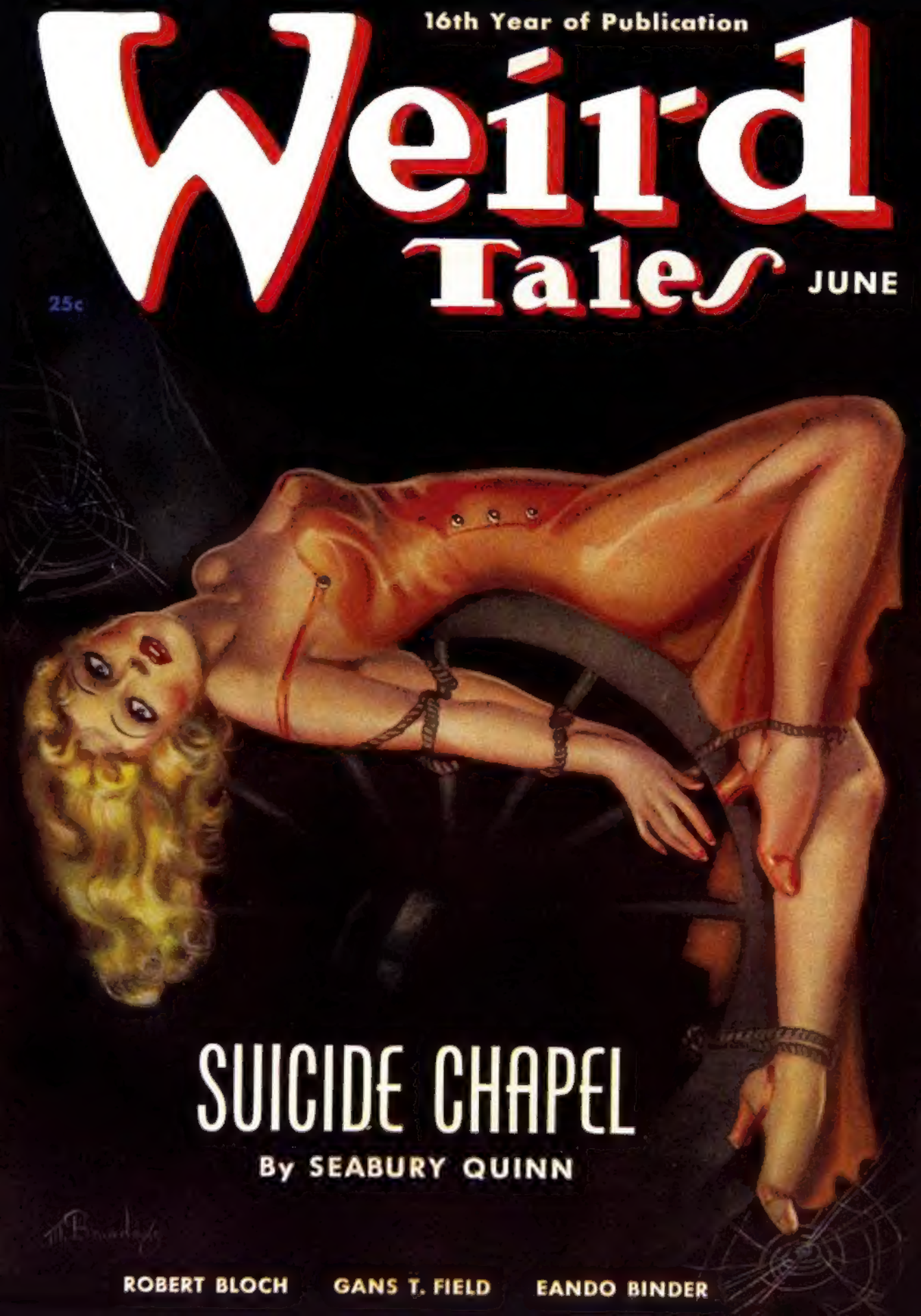

SUICIDE CHAPEL

By SEABURY QUINN

ROBERT BLOCH GANS T. FIELD EANDO BINDER

Concealed from the Eyes of Man

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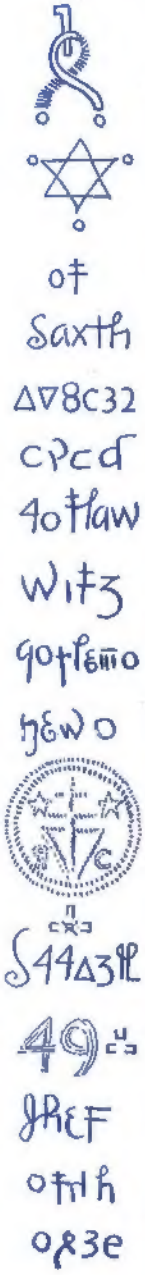

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Speak, speak, thou fearful guest,
Who, with thy hollow chest,
All in rude armor dressed,
Comest to daunt me!
—Longfellow: *The Skeleton in Armor.*

A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL

Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE

Volume 31 CONTENTS FOR JUNE, 1938 Number 6

Cover Design . . . . . M. Brundage
Illustrating a scene in "Suicide Chapel"

The Skeleton in Armor . . . . . Virgil Finlay 641
Pictorial interpretation of a poem by Longfellow

Suicide Chapel . . . . . Seabury Quinn 643
A Jules de Grandin story of fearful murders, lovely girls and a giant ape

The Last Hour . . . . . Robert E. Howard 664
Verse

From the Beginning . . . . . Eando Binder 665
An utterly strange tale of the origin of the human race

H. P. Lovecraft . . . . . Frank Belknap Long, Jr. 683
A tribute in verse

The Black Drama . . . . . Gans T. Field 684
An eldritch tale about the eery personality called Varduk—a tale of Lord Byron

Slave of the Flames . . . . . Robert Bloch 700
A weird tale of the great Chicago fire

Song of Death . . . . . A. W. Calder 713
Over the ether waves rode a sensuous song that carried death to its listeners

Thunder in the Dawn (end) . . . . . Henry Kuttner 723
A tale of warlocks and wizards and valiant men of might in the far-off olden time

The Doom that Came to Sarnath . . . . . H. P. Lovecraft 742
Another weird fantasy by a late great master of bizarre and fantastic literature

Outlanders . . . . . Clark Ashton Smith 746
Verse

Death Dallies Awhile . . . . . Leslie F. Stone 747
The story of a microscopic universe created by the genius of a great scientist

Weird Story Reprint:

The Gray Champion . . . . . Nathaniel Hawthorne 754
A classic weird tale of old New England

Farewell to Eros . . . . . Clark Ashton Smith 759
Verse

The Eyrie 762
The readers of WEIRD TALES express their opinions

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

"She did not swoon, but fought him valiantly."

Suicide Chapel

By SEABURY QUINN

A story of fearsome murders, and a herd of giant apes from the African jungles —an exploit of Jules de Grandin

ALTHOUGH the calendar declared it was late May the elements and the thermometer denied it. All day the rain had streamed torrentially and the wind keened like a moaning banshee through the newly budded leaves that furred the maple boughs. Now the raving tempest laid a lacquer-like veneer of driven water on the window-pane and howled a bawdy chanson down the chimney where a four-log fire was blazing on the hearth. Fresh from a steaming shower

and smelling most agreeably of Roman Hyacinth, Jules de Grandin sat before the fire and gazed with unconcealed approval at the toe tip of his purple leather slipper. A mauve silk scarf was knotted Ascot fashion round his throat, his hands were drawn up in the sleeves of his deep violet brocade dressing-gown, and on his face was that look of somnolent content which well-fed tom-cats wear when they are thoroughly at peace with themselves and the world. "Not for a thousand gold Napoléons would I set foot outside this house again tonight," he told me as he dipped into the pocket of his robe, fished out a pack of "Marylands" and set one of the evil-smelling things alight. "Three times, three separate, distinct times, have I been soaked to saturation in this *sacré* rain today. Now, if the Empress Josèphine came to me in the flesh and begged that I should go with her, I would refuse the assignation. Regretfully, *mais certainement,* but definitely. Me, I would not stir outside the door for——"

"Sergeant Costello, if ye plaze, sor," came the rich Irish brogue of Nora McGinnis, my household factotum, who appeared outside the study entrance like a figure materialized in a vaudeville illusion. "He says it's most important, sor."

"*Tiens,* bid him enter, *ma petite,* and bring a bottle of the Irish whisky from the cellar," de Grandin answered with a smile; then:

"*C'est véritablement toi, ami?*" he asked as the big Irishman came in and held cold-reddened fingers to the fire. "What evil wind has blown you out on such a fetid night?"

"Evil is th' word, sor," Costello answered as he drained the glass de Grandin proffered. "Have ye been radin' in th' papers of th' Cogswell gur-rl's disappearin', I dunno?"

"But yes, of course. Was she not the young woman who evaporated from her dormitory at the Shelton School three months ago? You have found her, *mon vieux?* You are to be congratulated. In my experience——"

"Would yer experience tell ye what to do when a second gur-rl pops outa sight in pracizely th' same manner, lavin' nayther hide nor hair o' clue?"

De Grandin's small blue eyes closed quickly, then opened wide, for all the world like an astonished cat's. "But surely, there is some little trace of evidence, some hint of hidden romance, some——"

"Some nothin' at all, sor. Three months ago today th' Cogswell gur-rl went to 'er room immejiately afther class. Th' elevator boy who took her up seen her walk down th' hall, two classmates said hello to her. Then she shut her door, an' shut herself outa th' wor-rld entirely, so it seems. Nobody's seen or heard o' her since then. This afthernoon, just afther four o'clock, th' Lefétre gur-rl comes from th' lab'ratory, goes straight to 'er room an'" — he paused and raised his massive shoulders in a ponderous shrug— "there's another missin'-persons case fer me to wrastle wid. I've come to ask yer help, sor."

De Grandin pursed his lips and arched his narrow brows. "I am not interested in criminal investigation, *mon sergent.*"

"Not even to save an old pal in a hot spot, sor?"

"*Hein?* How is it you say?"

" 'Tis this way, sor. When th' Cogswell gur-rl evaporated, as ye say, they gave th' case to me, though be rights it b'longed to th' Missin' Persons Bureau. Well, sor, when a gur-rl fades out that way there may be anny number o' good reasons fer it, but mostly it's because she wants to. An' th' more ye asks th' family questions th' less ye learn. 'Had she anny love affairs?' sez you, an' 'No!' sez they, as if ye'd been set on insultin' her. 'Wuz she happy in her home?' ye asks, an' 'Cer-

tainly, she wuz!' they tells ye, an' they imply ye've hinted that they bate her up each night at eight o'clock an' matinees at two-fifteen. So it goes. Each time ye try to git some reason for her disappearin' act they gits huffier an' huffier till finally they sez they're bein' persecuted, an' ye git th' wor-rks, both from th' chief an' newspapers."

"Perfectly," de Grandin nodded. "As Monsieur Gilbert says, a policeman's life is not a happy one."

"Ye're tellin' me! But this time it's still worse, sor. When I couldn't break th' Cogswell case they hinted I wuz slowin' down, an' had maybe seen me best days. Now they goes an' dumps this here new case in me lap an' tells me if I fail to break it I'll be back in harness wid a nightsthick in me hand before I've checked another birthday off. So, sor, if ye could——"

"Pas possible! They dare say this to you, the peerless officer, the pride of the *gendarmerie*——"

"They sure did, sor. An' lots more——"

"Aside, Friend Trowbridge; aside, *mon sergent*—make passageway for me. Await while I put on my outside clothing. I shall show them, me. We shall see if they can do such things to my tried friend —*les crétins!*"

SO INCREDIBLY short was the interval elapsing before he rejoined us with his hat pulled down above his eyes, trench coat buttoned tight beneath his chin, that I could not understand until I caught a flash of violet silk pajama leg bloused out above the top of his laced boots.

"Lead on, my *sergent,*" he commanded. "Take us to the place which this so foolish girl selected for her disappearance. We shall find her or otherwise!"

"Would ye be manin' 'or else,' sor, I dunno?"

"Ah bah, who cares? Let us be about our task!"

"Sure, we got a full description o' th' clothes she wore when she skedaddled," Costello told us as we drove out toward the fashionable suburb where the Shelton School was located. "She wuz wearin' orange-colored lounging pajamas an' pegged orange-colored slippers."

"Pegged?" de Grandin echoed. "Was she then poor——"

"Divil a bit o' it, sor. Her folks is rich as creases, but she wuz overdrawn on her allowance, and had to cut th' corners till her next check came."

"One comprehends. And then——"

"There ain't no then, sor. We've inventoried all her wardrobe, an' everything is present but th' duds she wore when she came in from class. Not even a hat's missin'. O' course, that don't mean nothin' much. If she'd set her heart on lammin', she coulda had another outfit waitin' for her somewheres else, but——"

"Quite but, my friend," de Grandin nodded. "Until the contrary appears, we must assume she went away *sans trousseau.*"

With characteristic fickleness the shrewish storm had blown itself away while we drove from the city, and a pale half-waning moon tossed like a bit of lucent jetsam in a purling surf of broken clouds as we drew up beneath the porte-cochère of the big red brick dormitory whence Emerline Lefètre had set forth for her unknown goal six hours earlier.

"Yas, suh," replied the colored elevator operator, visibly enjoying the distinction of being questioned by the police. "Ah remembers puffickly erbout hit all. Miss Lefètre come in from lab. She seemed lak she was in a powerful hurry, an' didn't say a thing, 'ceptin' to thank me for de letters."

"The letters? Do you by any happy

circumstance remember whence they came?"

"Naw, suh. Ah don' look at de young ladies' mail, 'ceptin' to see who hit's for. I recolleck dese letters mos' partickler, though, 'cause one of 'em wuz smelled up so grand."

"Perfumed?"

"An' how, suh. Jus' lak de scents de conjur doctors sell, on'y more pretty-smellin'. Dat one wuz in a big vanilla envelope. All sealed up, it wuz, but de odor come right through de paper lak hit wuz nothin' a-tall."

"Merci bien. Now, if you will kindly take us up——"

THE little room where Emerline Lefètre dwelt was neat and colorless as only hospital, barrack or dormitory rooms can be. No trace of dust marred imitation mahogany furniture. Indifferent reproductions of several of the less rowdy Directoire prints were ranged with mathematical precision on the walls. The counterpane was squared with blocks of blue and white so virginally chaste as to seem positively spinsterish. *"Mon Dieu,* it is a dungeon, nothing less," de Grandin murmured as he scanned the place. "Can anybody blame a girl for seeking sanctuary from such terrible surround — *quel parfum horrible!"* His narrow nostrils quivered as he sniffed the air. "She had atrocious taste in scent, this so mysteriously absent one."

"Perhaps it's the elegant perfume the elevator operator mentioned," I ventured. "He'd have admired something redolent of musk——"

"Dis donc! You put your finger on the pulse, my friend! It is the musk. But yes. I did not recognize him instantly, but now I do. The letter she received was steeped in musk. Why, in Satan's name? one wonders."

Thoughtfully, he walked slowly to the window, opened it and thrust his head out, looking down upon the cement walk some fifty feet below. Neither ivy, waterspout nor protuberance of the building offered foothold for a mouse upon the flat straight wall.

"I do not think she went that way," he murmured as he turned to look up at the overhanging roof.

"Nor that way, either, sor," Costello rejoined, pointing to the overhanging of mansard roof some seven feet above the window-top.

"U'm? One wonders." Reaching out, de Grandin tapped an iron cleat set in the wall midway of the window's height. From the spike's tip branched a flange of a turnbuckle, evidently intended to secure a shutter at some former time. "A very active person might ascend or—*parbleu!"*

Breaking off his words half uttered, he took a jeweler's loop out of his raincoat pocket, fixed it in his eye, then played the beam of his electric torch upon the window-sill, subjecting it to a methodical inspection.

"What do you make of this, my friends?" he asked as he passed the glass to us in turn, directing his light ray along the gray stone sill and indicating several tiny scratches on the slate. "They may be recent, they may have been here since the building was erected," he admitted as we handed back the glass, "but in cases such as this there are no such things as trifles."

Once more he leant across the window-sill, then mounted it and bent out till his eyes were level with the rusty iron cleat set in the wall.

"Morbleu, it is a repetition!" he exclaimed as he rejoined us. "Up, my *sergent,* up, friend Trowbridge, and see what you can see upon that iron."

Gingerly, I clambered to the sill and viewed the rusty cleat through the enlarging-glass while Costello played the flashlight's beam upon it. On the iron's red-

dish surface, invisible, or nearly so, to naked eyes, but clearly visible through the loop's lens, there showed a row of sharp, light scratches, exactly duplicating those upon the window-sill.

"Bedad, I don't know what it's all about, sor," Costello rumbled as he concluded his inspection, "but if it's a wild-goose chase we're on I'm thinkin' that we've found a feather in th' wind to guide us."

"*Exactement.* One is permitted to indulge that hope. Now let us mount the roof.

"Have the care," he cautioned as Costello took his ankles in a firm grip and slid him gently down the slanting, still-wet slates. "I have led a somewhat sinful life, and have no wish to be projected into the beyond without sufficient time to make my peace with heaven."

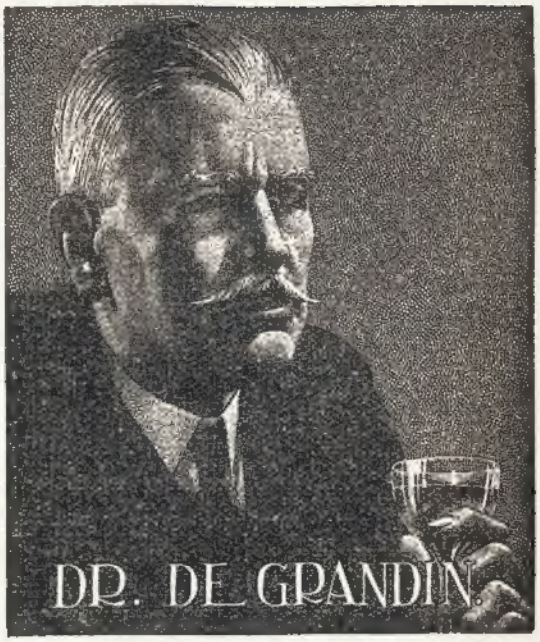
"No fear, sor," grinned Costello. "Ye're a little pip squeak, savin' yer presence, an' I can swing ye be th' heels till mornin' if this rotten brickwor-rk don't give way wid me."

Wriggling eel-like on his stomach, de Grandin searched the roof slates inch by careful inch from the leaded gutter running round the roof bank's lower edge to the lower brick ridge that marked the incline's top. His small blue eyes were shining brightly as he rejoined us.

"*Mes amis,* there is the mystery here," he announced solemnly. "Across the gutter to the slates, and up the slates until the roof's flat top is reached, there is a trail of well defined, light scratches. Moreover, they are different."

"Different, sor? How d'ye mean——"

"Like this: Upon the window-sill they are perceptibly more wide and deep at their beginning than their end—like exclamation marks viewed from above. In the gutter and upon the roof they are reversed, with deeper gashes at the lower



ends and lighter scratches at their upper terminals."

"O. K., sor. Spill it. I'm not much good at riddles."

A momentary frown inscribed twin upright wrinkles between de Grandin's brows. "One cannot say with surety, but one may guess," he answered slowly, speaking more to himself than to us. "If the marks were uniform one might infer someone had crawled out of the window, mounted to the gutter by the ringbolt set into the wall, then climbed upon the roof. An active person might accomplish it. But the situation is quite otherwise. The scratches on the slates reverse the scorings on the window-sill."

"You've waded out beyond me depth, now, sor," Costello answered.

"*Tiens,* mine also," the Frenchman grinned. "But let us hazard a conjecture: Suppose one wearing hobnailed boots—or shoes which had been pegged, as Miss Lefètre's were—had crawled out from this window: how would he use his feet?"

"To stand on, I praysume, sor."

"*Ah bah.* You vex me, you annoy me, you get upon my goat! Standing on the

sill and reaching up and out to grasp that iron cleat, he would have used his feet to brace himself and pivot on. His tendency would be to turn upon his toes, thereby tracing arcs or semicircles in the stone with the nails set in his shoes. But that is not the case here. The scorings marked into the stone are deeper at beginning, showing that the hobnailed shoes were scratching in resistance, clawing, if you please, against some force which bore the wearer of those shoes across the window-sill. Digging deeply at beginning, the nail marks taper off, as the shoes slipped from the stone and their wearer's weight was lifted from the sill.

"When we view the iron cleat we are upon less certain ground. One cannot say just how a person stepping to the iron would move his feet in climbing to the roof; but when we come to read the slates we find another chapter in this so puzzling story. Those marks were left by someone who fought not to mount the roof; but who was struggling backward with the strength of desperation, yet who was steadily forced upward. Consider, if you please: The fact that such resistance, if successful, would have resulted in this person's being catapulted to the cement path and almost surely killed, shows us conclusively the maker of those marks regarded death as preferable to going up that roof. Why? one asks."

"PARDON me, sir, are you from headquarters?" Slightly nasal but not at all unmusical, the challenge drawled at us across the corridor. From the doorway of the room set opposite to Emerline's a girl regarded us with one of the most indolent, provocative "come-hither" looks I'd ever seen a woman wear. She was of medium height, not slender and not stout, but lushly built, with bright hair, blond as a well-beaten egg, worn in a page-boy bob and curled up slightly at the ends. From round throat to high white insteps she was draped in black velvet pajamas which had obviously not been purchased ready-made, but sculptured to her perfect measure, for her high, firm, ample breasts pushed up so strongly underneath the velvet that the dip of the fabric to her flat stomach was entirely without wrinkles. Her trousers were so loose about the legs they simulated a wide skirt, but at the hips they fitted with a skin-tight snugness as revealing as a rubber bathing-suit. From high-arched, carefully penciled brows to blood-red toenails she was the perfect figure of the siren, and I heard Costello gasp with almost awe-struck admiration as his eyes swept over her.

"We are, indeed, *ma belle,*" de Grandin answered. "You wish to speak with us?"

Her blue eyes widened suddenly, then dropped a veil of carefully mascaraed lashes which like an odalisque's thin gossamer revealed more than it hid. They were strange eyes to see in such a young face, meaningful and knowing, a little weary, more than a little mocking. "Yes," she drawled lazily. "You're on the case of Emerline Lefètre, aren't you?"

"Yes, *Mademoiselle.*"

"Well, I'm sure she disappeared at five o'clock."

"Indeed? How is it that you place the time?"

A shrug which was a slow contortion raised her black-draped shoulders and pressed the pointed breasts more tightly still against her tucked-in jacket. "I was in bed all afternoon with a neuralgic headache. The last lab period today was out at half past four, and I heard the girls come down the hall from class. There's not much time till dinner when we come in late from lab, and a warning bell rings in the dorm at three minutes before five. When it went off this afternoon it almost split my head apart. The rain had

stopped; at least I didn't hear it beating on my window, but the storm had made it dark as midnight, and at first I thought it was a dream. Then I heard some of the girls go hurrying by, and knew that it was five o'clock, or not more than a minute past. I was lying there, trying to find energy to totter to the bureau for some mentholated cologne, when I heard a funny noise across the hall. I'm sure it came from Emerline's room."

"A funny noise, *Mademoiselle?* How do you mean?"

A little wrinkle furrowed down the smooth white skin between the penciled brows. "As nearly as I can describe it, it was like the opening quaver of a screech owl's cry, but it was shut off almost as it started. Then I heard a sound of stamping, as though there were a scuffle going on in there. I s'pose I should have risen and investigated, but I was too sick and miserable to do more than lie there wondering about it. Presently I fell asleep and forgot about it till I heard you in her room just now." She paused and patted back a yawn. "Mind if I go in and have a look around?" she asked, walking toward us with a swinging, aphrodisiacally undulating gait. The aura of a heavy, penetrating perfume—musk-based patchouli essence, I determined at a hasty breath—seemed hovering round her like a cumulus of tangible vapor.

As far as Jules de Grandin was concerned her blandishments might have been directed at a granite statue. "It is utterly forbidden, *Mademoiselle.* We are most grateful for your help, but until we have the opportunity to sweep the place for clues we request that no one enter it."

"WHAT d'ye mean, sweep th' place for clues, sor?" asked Costello as we drove toward home.

"Precisely what I said, *mon vieux.* There may be clues among the very dust to make this so mysterious puzzle clear."

Arrived at the house, he rummaged in the broom cupboard, finally emerging with my newest vacuum sweeper underneath his arm. It was a cleaner I had let myself be argued into buying because, as the young salesman pointed out, instead of a cloth bag it had a sack of oiled paper which when filled could be detached and thrown away. To my mind this had much merit, but Nora McGinnis begged to disagree, and so the old cloth-bellows sweeper was in daily use while the newer, sanitary engine rested in the closet.

"Behold, my friend," he grinned, "there is a virtue to be found in everything. Madame Nora has refused to use the sweeper, thereby making it impossible for you to get return on your investment, but her stubbornness assists me greatly, for here I have a pack of clean fresh paper bags in which to gather up our evidence. You comprehend?"

"Ye mean ye're goin' to vacuum-sweep that room out to th' Shelton School?" Costello asked incredulously.

"Perfectly, my friend. The floor, the walls, perhaps the ceiling. When Jules de Grandin seeks for clues he does not play. Oh, no."

The door of Emerline Lefètre's room was open on a crack as we marched down the corridor equipped with vacuum sweeper and paper refills, and as de Grandid thrust it open with his foot we caught the heavy, almost overpowering odor of patchouli mixed with musk.

"Dame!" de Grandin swore. "She has been here, *cette érotofurieuse,* against my express orders. And she has raised the window, too. How can we say what valuable bit of evidence has been blown out —*morbleu!"*

Positively venomous with rage, he had stamped across the room to slam the win-

dow down, but before he lowered it had leant across the sill. Now he rested hands upon the slate and gazed down at the cement pavement fifty feet below, a look of mingled pain and wonder on his face.

"Trowbridge, Costello, *mes amis*, come quickly!" he commanded, beckoning us imperiously. "Look down and tell me what it is you see."

Spotlighted by a patch of moonlight on the dull-gray cement walk a huddled body lay, inert, grotesque, unnatural-looking as a marionette whose wires have been cut. The flash of yellow hair and pale white skin against the somber elegance of sable velvet gave it positive identification.

"How th' divil did she come to take that tumble?" Costello asked as we dashed down the stairs, disdaining to wait on the slowly moving elevator.

"*Le bon Dieu* and the devil only know," de Grandin answered as he knelt beside the crumbled remnant of the girl's bright personality and laid a hand beneath her generously swelling breast.

The impact of her fall must have been devastating. Beneath her crown of gold-blond hair her skull vault had been mashed as though it were an eggshell; through the skin above her left eye showed a staring splinter of white bone where the shattered temporal had pierced the skin; just above the round neck of her velvet jacket thrust a jagged chisel-edge of white, remnant of a broken cervical vertebra. Already purple bruises of extravasated blood were forming on her face; her left leg thrust out awkwardly, almost perpendicularly to her body's axis, and where the loose-legged trouser had turned back we saw the Z-twist of a compound comminutive fracture.

"Is she——" began Costello, and de Grandin nodded as he rose.

"Indubitably," he returned. "Dead like a herring.

"But why should she have jumped?" I wondered. "Some evil influence — a wild desire to emulate——"

He made a gesture of negation. "How far is it from here to the house wall?" he asked.

"Why, some eighteen feet, I judge."

"*Précisément.* That much, at least. Is it in your mind her fall's trajectory would have been so wide an arc?"

"What's that?"

"Simply this, by blue! Had she leaped or fallen from the window she should have struck the earth much nearer to the building's base. The distance separating ground and window is too small to account for her striking thus far out; besides it is unlikely that she would have dived head first. Men sometimes make such suicidal leaps, women scarcely ever. Yet all the evidence discloses that she struck upon her head; at least she fell face forward. Why?"

"You imply that she was——"

"I am not sure, but from the facts as we observe them I believe that she was thrown, and thrown by one who had uncommon strength. She was a heavy girl; no ordinary person could have lifted her and thrown her through a window, yet someone must have done just that; there is no evidence of struggle in the room."

"Shall I take charge, sor?" asked Costello.

De Grandin nodded. "It will expedite our work if you will be so kind. When she is taken to the morgue I wish you would prevent the autopsy until I have a chance to make a more minute inspection of the body. Meantime I have important duties elsewhere."

METHODICALLY, as though he'd been a janitor—but with far more care for detail—he moved the vacuum sweeper back and forth across the floor of the small tragic room, drew out the paper bag

and sealed and labeled it. Then with a fresh bag in the bellows he swept the bed, the couch, the draperies. Satisfied that every latent trace of dust had been removed, he shut the current off, and, his precious bags beneath his arm, led the march toward my waiting car.

A sheet of clean white paper spread across the surgery table made background for the miscellany of fine refuse which he emptied from the sweeper's bags. Microscope to eye, he passed a glass rod vigorously rubbed with silk back and forth across the dust heap. Attracted by the static charge fine bits of rubbish adhered to the rod and were subjected to his scrutiny. As he completed his examination I viewed the salvage through a second microscope, but found it utterly uninteresting. It was the usual hodgepodge to be culled by vacuuming a broom-cleaned room. Tiny bits of paper, too fine to yield to straw brooms' pressure, little flecks of nondescript black dust, a wisp or two of wool fiber from the cheap rug, the trash was valueless from any viewpoint, as far as I could see.

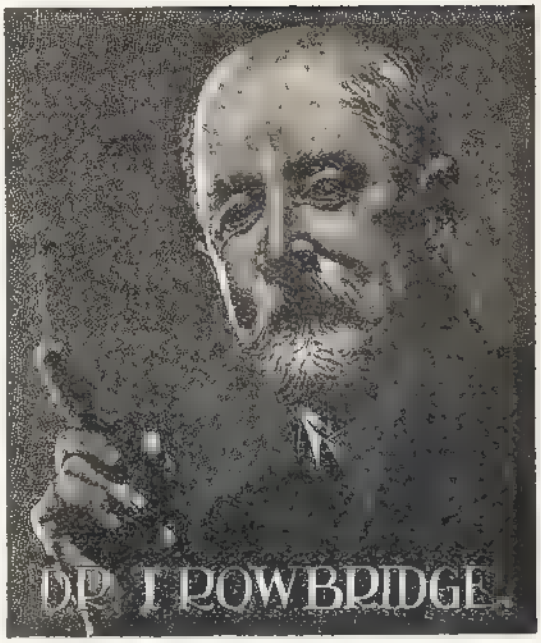
"Que diable?" With eyes intently narrowed he was looking at some object clinging to his glass rod.

"What is it?" I demanded, leaning closer.

"See if you can classify it," he returned, moving aside to let me look down through the viewhole of the microscope.

It was a strand of hair three-quarters of an inch or so in length, curled slightly, like a human body hair, but thicker, coarser in its texture. Reddish rusty brown at tip, it shaded to a dull gray at the center and bleached to white transparency about the base. I saw it was smooth-scaled upon its outer surface and terminated in a point, showing it had never been cut or, if clipped, had sufficient time to grow to its full length again.

"Let us proceed," I heard him whisper



as he moved his polished rod again across the heap of sweepings. "Perhaps we shall discover something else."

Slowly he moved the rod across the furrowed edges of the dust heap, pausing now and then to view a fresh find. A splinter of straw, a tiny tag of paper, fine, powdered dust, these comprised his salvage, till: "Ah?" he murmured, "ah-ha?" Adhering to the rod there was another wisp of hair, almost the counterpart of his first find, except it was more nearly uniform in color, dull lack-luster rust all over, like an aged tom-cat's fur, or the hair of some misguided woman who has sought a simulation of her vanished youth by having her gray tresses dyed with henna.

"What——" I began, but he waved me silent with a nervous gesture as he continued fishing with his rod. At last he laid the rod aside and began to winnow the dust piles through a fine wire screen. Half an hour's patient work resulted in the salvaging of two or three small chocolate-colored flakes which looked for all the world like grains of bran and when held close to our noses on

a sheet of folded paper gave off a sweetly penetrating odor.

"You recognize them?" he asked.

"Not by sight. By their smell I'd say they contained musk."

"Quite yes," he nodded. "They are musk. Crude musk, such as the makers of perfumery use."

"But what should that be doing in a young girl's room——"

"One wonders with the wonder of amazement. One also wonders what those hairs did there. I should say the musk flakes were contained in the brown envelope the elevator boy delivered to Mademoiselle Lefètre. As for the hairs——"

The tinkle of the telephone broke off his explanation. "Yes, my *sergent,* it is I," I heard him answer. "He is? Restrain him — forcefully, if necessary. I shall make the haste to join you.

"Come, let us hurry," he commanded as he set the 'phone down.

"Where, at this hour o' night, for pity's sake?"

"Why, to the morgue, of course. Parnell, the coroner's physician, insists on making an autopsy on the body of Miss Henrietta Sidlo within the hour. We must look at her first."

"Who the devil was Miss Henrietta Sidlo?" I asked as we commenced our hurried journey to the city morgue.

"The so attractive blond young woman who was killed because she could not mind her business and keep from the room we had forbidden her to enter."

"What makes you so sure she was killed? She might have fallen from the window, or——"

"Or?" he echoed.

"Oh, nothing. I just had a thought."

"I rejoice to hear it. What was it, if you please?"

"Perhaps she thought as you did, that Miss Lefètre had climbed to the roof, and tried to emulate the feat experimentally."

I had expected him to scout my theory, but he nodded thoughtfully. "It may be so," he answered. "It seems incredible that one should be so foolish, but the Sidlo girl was nothing if not unbelievable, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

BENEATH the searing glare that flooded from the clustered arclights set above the concave operating-table in the morgue's autopsy room her body showed almost as pale as the white tiles that floored and walled the place. She had bled freely from the nose and ears when skull and brain were smashed at once, and the dried blood stained her chin and cheeks and throat. De Grandin took a spray-nosed hose and played its thread-like stream across her face and neck, sponging off the dried blood with a wad of cotton. At length: "What is it that you see?" he asked.

Where the blood and grime had washed away were five light livid patches, one some three inches in size and roughly square, and extending from it four parallel lines almost completely circling the neck. At the end of each was a deeply pitted scar, as if the talons of some predatory beast had sunk into the flesh.

"Good heavens," I exclaimed; "it's terrible!"

"But naturally. One does not look for beauty in the morgue. I asked you what you saw, not for your *impression esthetique.*"

I hesitated for a breath and felt his small blue eyes upon me in a fixed, unwinking stare, quizzical, sardonic; almost, it seemed, a little pleading. Long years ago, when we had known each other but a day, he and I had stood beside another corpse in this same morgue, the corpse of a young girl who had been choked and mauled to death by a gorilla. "Sarah Humphreys——" I began; and:

"Bravo, bravissimo!" he whispered.

"You have right, my friend. See, here is the bruise left by the heel of his hand; these encircling marks, they are his fingers; these jagged, deep-set marks the wounds left by his broken nails. Yes, it is so. There is no thumb print, for he does not grasp like men, he does not use his thumb for fulcrum."

"Then those hairs you found when you swept up the room——"

"*Précisément.* I recognized them instantly, but could not imagine how they came there. If—one moment, if you please!"

Bending quickly he took the dead girl's pale plump hands in his and with his penknife tip skimmed underneath the rims of her elaborately lacquered nails, dropping the salvage into a fresh envelope. "I think that we shall find corroboration in a microscopic test of these," he stated, but the bustling entrance of the coroner's physician cut him short.

"What's going on here?" Doctor Parnell asked. "No one should touch this body till I've finished my examination——"

"We do but make it ready for you, *cher collègue,*" de Grandin answered with fictitious mildness as he turned away. Outside he muttered as we climbed into my car: "There are fools, colossal fools, damned fools, and then there is Parnell. He is superlative among all fools, friend Trowbridge."

Three-quarters of an hour later we put the scrapings from the dead girl's nails beneath a microscope. Most of the matter was sheer waste, but broken and wedged firmly in a tiny drop of nail stain we came upon the thing we sought, a tiny fragment of gorilla hair.

"*Tiens,* she fought for life with nature's weapons, *cette pauvre,*" he murmured as he rose from the examination. "It is a pity she should die so young and beautiful. We must take vengeance for her death, my friend."

AMBER brocade curtains had been drawn against the unseasonably chilly weather and a bright fire crackled on the hearth of the high-manteled fireplace of the lounging-room of the Lefètre home in Nyack. Harold Lefètre greeted us restrainedly. Since dinnertime the day before he had been interviewed by a succession of policemen and reporters, and his nerves and patience were stretched almost to the snapping-point.

"There isn't anything that I can add to what you've been already told," he said like one who speaks a well-learned piece. "Emerline was just past seventeen, she had no love affairs, wasn't especially interested in boys. Her scholastic standing was quite good, though she seldom got past B grades. She was not particularly studious, so it couldn't have been a nervous breakdown forced by overstudy. She stood well enough in marks not to have been worried over passing her examinations; she was happy in her home. There is no reason, no earthly reason I can think of, for her to disappear. I've told you everything I know. Suppose you try looking for her instead of quizzing me."

Costello's face flushed brick-red. He had been against the interview, expecting a rebuke would be forthcoming.

De Grandin seemed oblivious to Lefètre's censure. His eyes were traveling round the charming room in a quick, stock-taking gaze. He noted with approval the expensive furniture, the bizarre small tables with their litter of inconsequential trifles, cinnabar and silver cigarette-containers, fashionable magazines, bridge markers, the deep bookshelves right and left of the big fireplace, the blurred blues and mulberries of the antique china in the unglassed cabinets.

In a far, unlighted corner of the room his questing glance seemed resting, as though he had attained the object of his search. In apposition to the modern, western, super-civilized sophistication of the other bric-à-brac the group of curios seemed utterly incongruous; a hippopotamus leg with hoof intact, brass-lined to form a cane stand and holding in its tube a sheaf of African assagais. Above the group of relics hung a little drum no bigger than a sectioned coconut, with a slackly tensioned head of dull gray parchment. "*Monsieur,*" the Frenchman suddenly demanded, "you were in Africa with Willis Cogswell in 1922?"

Lefètre eyed him sharply. "What has that to do——"

"It was Monsieur Cogswell's daughter who vanished without trace three months ago, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

"I still don't see——"

"There were three members of your African adventure, were there not: yourself, and Messieurs Cogswell and Everton?"

Anger flamed in our host's face as he turned on Costello. "What has all this got to do with Emerline's case?" he almost roared. "First you come badgering me with senseless questions about her, now you bring this 'expert' here to pry into my private life——"

"You did not part with Monsieur Everton in friendship?" de Grandin broke in imperturbably. Then, as if his question were rhetorical: "But no. Quite otherwise. You and he and Monsieur Cogswell quarreled. He left you vowing vengeance——"

"See here, I've had enough of this unwarranted——"

"And ninety days ago he struck at Willis Cogswell through the dearest thing that he possessed. Attend me very carefully, *Monsieur.* You have heard that shock caused Monsieur Cogswell to collapse, that he died of a heart seizure two days following his daughter's disappearance——"

"Of course, he did. Why shouldn't he? He'd been suffering from angina for a year, had to give up business and spend half his time in bed. His doctor'd warned him anything exciting might prove fatal——"

"*Précisément.* He fell dead in his library. His butler found him dead upon the floor——"

"That's true, but what——"

De Grandin drew a slip of folded paper from his pocket. "This was in your friend's hand when the butler found him," he answered as he held the missive toward our host. It was a piece of coarse brown paper, torn, apparently from a grocery bag, and penciled on it in black chalk was one word: *Bokoli.*

The anger faded from Lefètre's face; fear drained his color, left him gray.

"You recognize the writing?" asked de Grandin.

"No, no, it can't be," Lefètre faltered. "Everton is dead—we—I saw him——"

"And these, *Monsieur,* we found among the sweepings from your daughter's room," de Grandin interrupted. "You recognize them, *hein?*" Fixed with adhesive gum to a card of plain white paper, he extended the gorilla hairs we'd found the night before.

Utter panic replaced fear in our host's face. His eyes were glassy, bright and dilated as if drugged with belladonna. They shifted here and there, as though he sought some channel of escape. His lips began to twist convulsively.

"This—this is a trick!" he mumbled, and we saw the spittle drooling from the corners of his mouth. "This couldn't be——"

His hands shook in a nervous frenzy, clawing at his collar. Then suddenly his knees seemed softening under him, and

every bit of stiffness left his body so that he fell down in a heap before the hearth, the impact of his fall rattling the brass tools by the fireplace.

Involuntarily I shivered. Something evil and soft-footed seemed to shuffle in that quiet room, but there was no seeing it, no hearing it, no way of knowing what it was; only the uncanny, hideous feel of it—clammy, cold, obscenely leering.

"Now—so!" de Grandin soothed as he lowered his flask from the reviving man's lips. "That is better, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

He helped Lefètre to a chair, and, "Would it not be well to tell us all about it?" he suggested. "You have had a seething pot inside you many years, *Monsieur;* it has boiled, then simmered down, then boiled again, and it has brought much scum up in the process. Let us skim it off, *comme ça*"—he made a gesture as if with a spoon—"and throw it out. Only so shall we arrive at mental peace."

LEFETRE set his face like one who contemplates a dive in icy water. "There were four of us on safari through Bokoliland," he answered; "Cogswell, his wife Lysbeth, a Boer settler's daughter, Everton and I. We'd found the going pretty rough; no ivory, no trading fit to mention, no gold, and our supplies were running low. When we reached Shamboko's village the men were all out hunting, but the women and old men were kind to us and fed and lodged us. In normal circumstances we'd have waited there until the chief came back and tried to do some trading, but on the second evening Everton came hurrying to our hut half drunken with excitement.

" 'I've just been to the Ju-Ju house,' he told us. 'D'ye know what they've got there? Gold! Great heaps and stacks o' yellow dust, enough to fill our hats and pockets, and a stack o' yellow diamonds bigger than your head. Let's go!'

"Now, the Bokoli are a fairly peaceful folk, and they'd take a lot from white men, but if you monkey with their women or their Ju-Ju you'd better have your life insurance premiums all paid. I'd seen the body of a man they'd 'chopped' for sacrilege one time, and it had put the fear o' God in me. They'd flayed the skin off him, not enough to kill him, but the torment must have been almost past standing. Then they'd smeared honey on the raw nerve ends and staked him down spread-eagled in a clearing in the jungle. The ants had found him there—millions of the little red ones—and they'd cleaned the flesh off of his bones as if they had been boiled.

"I wasn't having any of that, so I turned the proposition down, but the others were all for it. Finally I yielded and we sneaked down to the Ju-Ju house. It was just as Everton had said. The gold was piled in little pyramidal heaps before the idol in a semicircle, with the diamonds stacked up in the center. The offerings must have been accumulating over several centuries, for there's little gold in the Bokoli country, and no diamonds nearer than five hundred miles. But there the stuff was, ready for our taking.

"We stuffed our haversacks and pockets and set out for the coast within an hour, anxious to put as many miles as possible between us and the village before the medicine man paid his morning visit to the Ju-Ju and found out what we'd done.

"Everton began to act queer from the start. He'd sneak away from camp at night and be gone hours at a time without an explanation. One night I followed him. He made straight for a clearing by

the river and sat down on the grass as if waiting someone. Presently I saw a shadow slipping from the bush and next moment a full-grown gorilla shambled out into the moonlight. Instead of rushing Everton the monster stopped a little distance off and looked at him, and Everton looked back, then—think I'm a liar if you wish—they *talked* to one another. Don't ask me how they did it; I don't know. I only know that Everton addressed a series of deep grunts to the great beast and it answered him in kind. Then they parted and I trailed him back to camp.

"Three days later the Bokoli caught us. We'd just completed dinner and were sitting down to smoke when all at once the jungle seemed alive with 'em, great strapping blacks with four-foot throwing-spears and bullhide shields and vulture feathers in their hair. They weren't noisy about it. That was the worst of it. They appeared like shadows out of nowhere and stood there in a ring, just looking at us. Old Chief Shamboko did the honors, and he was as polite about it as the villain in a play. No reproaches for the diamonds and the gold dust we'd made off with, though they must have represented his tribe's savings for a century or more. Oh, no, he put it squarely to us on the ground of sacrilege. The Ju-Ju was insulted. He'd lost face. Only blood could wash away the memory of the insult, but he'd be satisfied with one of us. Just one. We were to make the choice. Then he walked back to the ring of warriors and stood waiting for us to announce which one of us would go back to be flayed alive and eaten up by ants. Pretty fix to be in, eh?"

"You made no offer to return the loot?" de Grandin asked.

"I'll say we did. Told him he might have our whole trade stock to boot, but he wasn't interested. The treasure we had taken from the temple had been tainted by our touch, so couldn't be put back, and only things dug from the earth were suitable as offerings to the Ju-Ju, so our trade stuff had no value. Besides, they wanted blood, and blood was what they meant to have."

"One sees. Accordingly——?"

"We tossed for it. Lysbeth, Conroy's wife, drew out a coin and whispered something to her husband. Then he and Everton and I stood by as she flipped it. Conroy beat us to the call and shouted 'Heads!' And heads it came. That left Everton and me to try.

"He shouted 'Tails!' almost before the silver left her hand. It came up heads again, and I was safe."

"And so——"

"Just so. The Bokoli couldn't understand our words, of course, but they knew that Everton had lost by his demeanor, and they were on him in a second, pinioning his arms against his sides with grass rope before he had a chance to draw his gun and shoot himself.

"Considering what he was headed for, you could hardly blame him, but it seemed degrading, the way he begged for life. We'd seen him in a dozen desperate fixes when his chance of coming through alive seemed absolutely nil, but he seemed like another person, now, pleading with us to shoot him, or die fighting for him, making us the most outlandish offers, promising to be our slave and work for ever without wages if we'd only save him from the savages. Even old Shamboko seemed to feel embarrassed at the sight of such abysmal cowardice in a white man, and he'd ordered his young men to drag their victim off when Everton chanced to kick the silver coin which sent him to his fate. The florin shone and twinkled in the moonlight when he turned it over. Then he and I and all of us realized. It was a trick piece Lysbeth used, an old Dutch

florin with two heads. There hadn't been a chance her man could lose the toss, for she'd told him to call heads, and she'd flipped the coin herself, so none of us could see it was a cheat.

"EVERTON turned sober in a second. Rage calmed him where his self-respect was powerless to overcome his fear of torture, and he rose with dignity to march away between the loki warriors. But just before he disappeared with them into the bush he turned on us. 'You'll never know a moment's safety, any of you,' he bellowed. 'The shadow of the jungle will be on you always, and it'll take the dearest things you have. Remember, you'll each lose the thing you love most dearly.'

"That was all. The Boloki marched him off, and we never saw him again."

"But, *Monsieur*——"

"But two weeks later, when we were almost at the outskirts of the Boer country, I woke up in the night with the sound of screaming in my ears. Conroy lay face downward by the campfire, and just disappearing in the bush was a great silver-backed gorilla with Lysbeth struggling in his arms."

"You pursued——"

"Not right away. I was too flabbergasted to do more than gape at what I saw for several seconds, and the big ape and the woman were gone almost before you could say 'knife.' Then there was Conroy to look after. He'd had a dreadful beating, though I don't suppose the beast had more than merely flung him from his way. They're incredibly powerful, those great apes. Conroy had a dislocated shoulder and two broken ribs, and for a while I thought he'd not pull through. I pulled his shoulder back in place and bandaged him as best I could, but it was several weeks before he regained strength to travel, and even then we had to take it slowly.

"I kept us alive by hunting, and one day while I was gunning I found Lysbeth. It was a week since she'd been stolen, but apparently she'd never been more than a mile or so away, for her body hung up in a tree-fork less than an hour's walk from camp, and was still warm when I found it.

"The ape had ripped her clothing off as he might have peeled a fruit, and apparently he'd been none too gentle in the process, for she was overlaid with scratches like a net. Those were just play marks, though. It wasn't till he tired of her—or till she tried to run away—he really used his strength on her. Down her arms and up her thighs were terrible, great gashes, deep enough to show the bone where skin and flesh had been shorn through in places. Her face was beaten absolutely flat, nose, lips and chin all smashed down to a bloody level. Her neck was broken. Her head hung down as if suspended by a string, and on her throat were bruise marks and the nail-prints of the great beast's hands where he had squeezed her neck until her spinal column snapped. I" — Lefètre faltered and we saw the shadow of abysmal horror flit across his face—"I don't like to think what had happened to the poor girl in the week between her kidnapping and killing."

Costello looked from our host to de Grandin. " 'Tis a highly interestin' tale, sor," he assured the Frenchman, "but I can't say as I sees where it fits in. This here now Everton is dead—ain't he?" he turned to Lefètre.

"I've always thought—I like to think he is."

"Ye saw 'im march off wid th' savages, didn't ye? They're willin' workers wid th' knife, if what ye say is true."

De Grandin almost closed his eyes and murmured softly, like one who speaks a poem learned in childhood and more than half forgotten: "It was December 2, 1923, that Lieutenant José Garcia of the Royal Spanish Army went with a file of native troops to inspect the little outpost of Akaar, which lies close by Bokoliland. He found the place in mourning, crazed with sorrow, fear and consternation. Some days before a flock of fierce gorillas had swept down upon the village, murdered several of the men and made away with numerous young women. From what the natives told him, Lieutenant Garcia learned such things had happened almost for a year in the Bokoli country, and that the village of the chief Shamboko had been utterly destroyed by a herd of giant apes——"

"That's it!" Lefètre shrieked. "We've never known. We heard about the ape raids and that Shamboko's village had been wrecked by them, but whether they destroyed it before Everton was put to death or whether they came down on it in vengeance—Conroy and I both thought he had been killed, but we couldn't know. When his daughter disappeared I didn't connect it with Africa, but that paper Conroy clutched when he dropped dead, those hairs you found in Emerline's room——"

"Exactement," de Grandin nodded as Lefètre's voice trailed off. "Perfectly, exactly, quite so, *Monsieur.* It is a very large, impressive 'but.' We do not know, we cannot surely say, but we can damn suspect."

"But for th' love o' mud, sor, how'd this here felly git so chummy wid th' apes?" Costello asked. "I've seen some monkeys in th' zoo that seemed to have more sense than many a human, but——"

"You don't ask much about companions' former lives in Africa," Lefètre interrupted, "but from scraps of information he let drop I gathered Everton had been an animal trainer in his younger days and that he'd also been on expeditions to West Africa and Borneo to collect apes for zoos and circuses. It may be he had some affinity for them. I know he seemed to speak to and to understand that great ape in the jungle—d'ye suppose——"

"I do, indeed, *Monsieur,"* de Grandin interrupted earnestly. "I am convinced of it."

"SURE, it's th' nuttiest business I iver heard of, sor," Costello declared as we drove home. " 'Tis wild enough when he stharts tellin' us about a man that talks to a gorilly, but when it's intaymated that a ape clomb up th' buildin' an' sthold th' gur-rl——"

"Such things have happened, *mon ami,"* de Grandin answered. "The records of the Spanish army, as well as reports of explorers, vouch for such kidnappings——"

"O. K., sor; O. K. But why should th' gorillies choose th' very gur-rls this felly Everton desired to have sthold? Th' apes ye tell about just snatch a woman—any woman — that chances in their way, but these here now gorillies took th' very——"

"Restez tranquil," de Grandin ordered. "I would think, I desire to cogitate. *Nom d'un porc vert,* I would meditate, consider, speculate, if you will let me have a little silence!"

"Sure, sor, I'll be afther givin' ye all ye want. I wuz only——"

"Nature strikes her balance with nicety," de Grandin murmured as though musing aloud. "Every living creature pays for what he has. Man lacks great strength, but reinforces frailty with reason; the bloodhound cannot see great distances, but his sense of smell is very keen; nocturnal creatures like the bat and

owl have eyes attuned to semi-darkness. What is the gorilla's balance? He has great strength, a marvelous agility, keen sight, but—*parbleu,* he lacks the sense of smell the lesser creatures have! You comprehend?"

"No, sor, I do not."

"But it is simple. His nose is little keener than his human cousins', but even his flat snout can recognize the pungent scent of crude musk at considerable distance. We do not know, we cannot surely say the Cogswell girl received an envelope containing musk upon the night she disappeared. We know that Mademoiselle Lefètre did." Abruptly:

"What sort of day was it Miss Cogswell disappeared?" he asked Costello.

The Irishman considered for a moment; then: "It wuz a wet, warm day in March, much like yesterday," he answered.

"It must have been," de Grandin nodded. "The great apes are susceptible to colds; to risk one in our nothern winter out of doors would be to sign his death warrant, and this one was required for a second job of work."

Costello looked at him incredulously. "I s'pose ye know how old th' snatchin' monkey wuz?" he asked ironically.

"Approximately, yes. Like man, gorillas gray with age, but unlike us, their gray hairs show upon their backs and shoulders. A 'silverback' gorilla may be very aged, or he may still be in the vigor of his strength. They mature fully at the age of fourteen; at twenty they are very old. I think the ape we seek is something like fifteen years old; young enough to be in his full prime, old enough to have been caught in early youth and trained consistently to recognize the scent of musk and carry off the woman who exuded it."

"TH' TELLYPHONE's been ringin' for a hour," Nora McGinnis told us as we drew up at my door. " 'Tis a Misther Lefètre, an' he wants ye to call back——"

"Merci bien," de Grandin called as he raced down the hall and seized the instrument. In a moment he was back. "Quick, at once, right away, my friends," he cried. "We must go back to Nyack."

"But, glory be, we've just come down from there," Costello started to object, but the look of fierce excitement in the Frenchman's face cut his protest short.

"Monsieur Lefètre has received a note like that which killed his friend Cogswell," de Grandin announced. "It was thrust beneath his door five minutes after we had gone."

"AND this," de Grandin tapped the scrap of ragged paper, "this shall be the means of trapping him who persecutes young girls."

"Arrah, sor, how ye're goin' to find 'im through that thing is more than I can see," Costello wondered. "Even if it has his fingerprints upon it, where do we go first?"

"To the office of the sheriff."

"Excuse me, sor, did ye say th' sheriff?"

"Your hearing is impeccable, my friend. Does not *Monsieur le Shérif* keep those sad-faced, thoughtful-looking dogs, the bloodhounds?"

"Be gob, sor, sure he does, but how'll ye know which way to lead 'em to take up th' scent?"

De Grandin flashed his quick, infectious grin at him. "Let us consider local geography. Our assumption is the miscreant we seek maintains an ape to do his bidding. Twice in three months a young girl has been kidnapped from the Shelton School — by this gorilla, we assume. America is a wondrous land. Things which would be marvels otherwhere pass unnoticed here, but a gorilla in the country is still sufficiently a novelty to excite comment. Therefore, the one we seek desires privacy. He lives obscurely, shielded

from his neighbors' prying gaze. Gorillas are equipped to walk, but not for long. The aerial pathways of the trees are nature's high roads for them. *Alors,* this one lives in wooded country. Furthermore, he must live fairly near the Shelton School, since his ape must be able to go there without exciting comment, and bring his quarry to his lair unseen. You see? It is quite simple. Somewhere within a mile or so of Shelton is a patch of densely wooded land. When we have found that place we set our hounds upon the track of him whose scent is on this *sacré* piece of paper, and—*voilà!"*

"Be gorry, sor, ye'll have no trohble findin' land to fit yer bill," Costello assured him. "Th' pine woods grow right to th' Shelton campus on three sides, an' th' bay is on th' other."

THE gentle bloodhounds wagged their tails and rubbed their velvet muzzles on de Grandin's faultlessly creased trousers. "Down, noble ones," he bade, dropping a morsel of raw liver to them. "Down, canine noblemen, peerless scenters-out of evil doers. We have a task to do tonight, thou and I."

He held the crudely lettered scrap of paper out to them and bade them sniff it, then began to lead them in an ever-widening circle through the thick-grown pine trees. Now and then they whimpered hopefully, their sadly thoughtful eyes upon him, then put their noses to the ground again. Suddenly one of them threw back his head and gave utterance to a short, sharp, joyous bark, followed by a deep-toned, belling bay.

"Tallis au!" de Grandin cried. "The chase is on, my friends. See to your weapons. That we seek is fiercer than a lion or a bear, and more stealthy than a panther."

Through bramble-bristling thicket, creeping under low-swung boughs and climbing over fallen trees, we trailed the dogs, deeper, deeper, ever deeper into the pine forest growing in its virgin vigor on the curving bay shore. It seemed to me we were an hour on the way, but probably we had not followed our four-footed guides for more than twenty minutes when the leprous white of weather-blasted clapboards loomed before us through the wind-bent boughs. "Good Lord," I murmured as I recognized the place. "It's Suicide Chapel!"

"Eh? How is it you say?" de Grandin shot back.

"That's what the youngsters used to call it. Years ago it was the meeting-place of an obscure cult, a sort of combination of the Holy Rollers and the Whitests. They believed the dead are in a conscious state, and to prove their tenets their pastors and several members of the flock committed suicide *en masse,* offering themselves as voluntary sacrifices. The police dispersed the congregation, and as far as I know the place has not been tenanted for forty years. It has an evil reputation, haunted, and all that, you know."

"Tenez, I damn think it is haunted now by something worse than any of the old ones' spooks," he whispered.

The ruined church was grim in aspect as a Doré etching. In the uncertain light of an ascending moon its clapboard sides, almost nude of paint, seemed glowing with unearthly phosphorescence. Patches of blue shadow lay like spilled ink on the weed-grown clearing round the edifice; the night wind keened a mournful threnody in the pine boughs. As we scrambled from the thicket of scrub evergreen and paused a moment in reconnaissance the ghostly hoot of an owl echoed weirdly through the gloom.

De Grandin cradled his short-barreled rifle in the crook of his left arm and pointed to the tottering, broken-sided steeple. "He is there if he is here," he announced.

"I don't think that I follow ye," Costello whispered back. "D'ye mane he's here or there?"

"Both. The wounded snake or rodent seeks the nearest burrow. The cat things seek the shelter of the thickets. The monkey folk take to the heights when they are hunted. If he has heard the hounds bay he has undoubtlessly—*mordieu!*"

Something heavy, monstrous, smotheringly bulky, dropped on me with devastating force. Hot, noisome breath was in my face and on my neck, great, steel-strong hands were clutching at my legs, thick, club-like fingers closed around my arms, gripping them until I thought my biceps would be torn loose from my bones. My useless gun fell clattering from my hands, the monster's bristling hair thrust in my eyes, my nose, my mouth, choking and sickening me as I fought futilely against his overpowering strength. Half fainting with revulsion I struggled in the great ape's grasp and fell sprawling to the ground, trying ineffectually to brace myself against the certainty of being torn to pieces. I felt my head seized in a giant paw, raised till I thought my neck would snap, then bumped against the ground with thunderous force. A lurid burst of light blazed in my eyes, followed by a deafening roar. Twice more the thunderous detonations sounded, and as the third report reverberated I felt the heavy weight on top of me go static. Though the hairy chest still bore me down, there was no movement in the great encircling arms, and the vise-like hands and feet had ceased their torturing pressure on my arms and legs. A sudden sticky warmness flooded over me, wetting through my jacket and trickling down my face.

"Trowbridge, *mon vieux, mon brave, mon véritable ami,* are you alive, do you survive?" de Grandin called as he and Costello hauled the massive simian corpse off me. "I should have shot him still more quickly, but my trigger finger would not mind my brain's command."

"I'm quite alive," I answered as I got unsteadily upon my feet and stretched my arms and legs tentatively. "Pretty well mauled and shaken, but——"

"S-s-sh," warned de Grandin. "There is another we must deal with. *Holà l'haut!"* he called. "Will you come forth, *Monsieur,* or do we deal with you as we dealt with your pet?"

STARK desolation reigned within the ruined church. Floors sagged uncertainly and groaned protestingly beneath our feet; the cheap pine pews were cracked and broken, fallen in upon themselves; throughout the place the musty, faintly acrid smell of rotting wood hung dank and heavy, like miasmic vapors of a marsh in autumn. Another smell was noticeable, too; the ammonia-laden scent of pent-up animals, such as hovers in the air of prisons, lazarets and primate houses at the zoo.

Guided by the odor and the searching beam shot by de Grandin's flashlight, we crossed the sagging floor with cautious steps until we reached the little eminence where in the former days the pulpit stood. There, like the obscene parody of a tabernacle, stood a great chest, some eight feet square, constructed of stout rough-sawn planks and barred across the front with iron uprights. A small dishpan half filled with water and the litter of melon rinds told us this had been the prison of the dead gorilla.

De Grandin stooped and looked inside the cage. *"Le pauvre sauvage,"* he murmured. "It was in this pen he dwelt. It was inhuman—*pardieu!"* Bending quickly he retrieved a shred of orange satin. He raised it to his nose, then passed it to us. It was redolent of musk.

"So, then, Jules de Grandin is the fool, the *imbécile*, the simpleton, the ninny, the chaser-after-shadows, *hein?*" he demanded. "Come, let us follow through our quest."

"Th' place seems empty, sor," Costello said as, following the wall, we worked our way toward the building's front. "If there wuz anny body here — Howly Mither!"

Across our path, like a doll cast aside by a peevish child there lay a grotesque object. The breath stopped in my throat, for the thing was gruesomely suggestive of a human body, but as de Grandin played his flashlight on it we saw it was a life-sized dummy of a woman. It was some five feet tall, the head was decorated by a blond bobbed wig, and it was clothed in well-made sports clothes—knit pullover, a kilted skirt of rough tweed, Shetland socks, tan heelless shoes—the sort of costume worn by eight in ten high school and college girls. As we bent to look at it the cloyingly sweet scent of musk assailed our nostrils.

"Is not all plain?—does it not leap to meet the eye?" de Grandin asked. "This was the implement of training. That hairy one out yonder had been trained for years to seek and bring back this musk-scented dummy. When he was letter-perfect in discovering and bringing back this lifeless simulacrum, his master sent him to the harder task of seeking out and stealing living girls who had the scent of musk upon them. *Ha,* one can see it plainly—the great ape leaping through the shadowed trees, scaling the school roof as easily as you or I could walk the streets, sniffing, searching, playing at this game of hide-and-seek he had been taught. Then from the open window comes the perfume which shall tell him that his quest is finished; there in the lighted room he sees the animated version of the dummy he has learned to seize and carry to this *sacré* place. He enters. There is a scream of terror from his victim. His great hand closes on her throat and her cry dies out before it is half uttered; then through the treetops he comes to the chapel of the suicides, and underneath his arm there is—*morbleu,* and what in Satan's name is that?"

As he lectured us he swung his flashlight in an arc, and as it pointed toward the ladder-hole that led up to the ruined belfry its darting ray picked up another form which lay half bathed in shadows, like a drowned body at the water's edge.

It was—or had been—a man, but it lay across our path as awkwardly as the first dummy. Its arms and legs protruded at unnatural angles from its trunk, and though it lay breast down the head was turned completely round so that the face looked up, and I went sick with disgust as I looked on what had once been human features, but were now so battered, flattened and blood-smeared that only staring, bulging eyes and broken teeth protruding through smashed lips told life had once pulsed underneath the hideous, shattered mask. Close beside one of the open, flaccid hands a heavy whip-stock lay, the sort of whip that animal trainers use to cow their savage pupils. A foot or so of plaited rawhide lash frayed from the weighted stock, for the long, cruel whip of braided leather had been ripped and pulled apart as though it had been made of thread.

"God rest 'is sinful soul!" Costello groaned. "Th' gorilly musta turned on 'im an' smashed 'im to a pulp. Looks like he'd tried to make a getaway, an' got pulled down from them stheps, sor, don't it?"

"By blue, it does; it most indubitably does," de Grandin agreed. "He was a cruel one, this, but the whip he used to beat his ape into submission was powerless at the last. One can find it in his

heart to understand the monster's anger and desire for revenge. But pity for this one? *Non!* He was deserving of his fate, I damn think."

"All th' same, sor—Howly Saint Patrick, what's that?" Almost overhead, so faint and weak as to be scarcely audible, there sounded a weak, whimpering moan.

"Up, up, my friends, it may be that we are in time to save her!" the little Frenchman cried, leaping up the palsied ladder like a seaman swarming up the ratlines.

We followed him as best we could and halted at the nest of crossbeams marking the old belfry. For a moment we stood silent, then simultaneously flashed our torches. The little spears of light stabbed through the shrouding darkness for a moment, and picked up a splash of brilliant orange in the opening where the bell had hung. Lashed to the bell-wheel was a girl's slim form, arms and feet drawn back and tied with cruel knots to the spokes, her body bowed back in an arc against the wheel's periphery. Her weight had drawn the wooden cycle down so that she hung dead-center at its bottom, but the fresh, strong rope spliced to the wheel-crank bore testimony to the torment she had been subjected to, the whirling-swinging torture of the mediæval bullwheel.

"Oh, please—please kill me!" she besought as the converging light beams played upon her pain-racked face. "Don't swing me any more—I can't—stand——" her plea trailed off in a thin whimpering mewl and her head fell forward.

"Courage, *Mademoiselle,*" the small Frenchman comforted. "We are come to take you home."

"BUT no, *mon sergent,*" Jules de Grandin shook his head in deprecation as he watched the ice cube slowly melting in his highball glass, "I have a great appreciation of myself, and am not at all averse to advertising, but in this case I must be anonymous. You it was who did it all, who figured out the African connection, and who found the hideaway to which the so unfortunate Miss Lefètre was conveyed. Friend Trowbridge and I did but go along to give you help; the credit must be yours. We shall show those fools down at headquarters if you are past your prime. We shall show them if you are unfit for crime detection. This case will make your reputation firm, and that you also found what happened to the Cogswell girl will add materially to your fame. Is it not so?"

"I only wish to God I did know what happened to poor Margaret Cogswell," the big detective answered.

De Grandin's smiling face went serious. "I have the fear that her fate was the same as that of Monsieur Cogswell's first wife. You recall how she was mauled to death by a gorilla? I should not be surprized if that ten-times-cursed Everton gave the poor girl to his great ape for sport when he had tired of torturing her. Tomorrow you would be advised to take a squad of diggers to that chapel of the suicides and have them search for her remains. I doubt not you will find them."

"An' would ye tell me one thing more, sor?"

"A hundred, if you wish."

"Why did th' gorilly kill th' Sidlo gur-rl instead o' carryin' her away?"

"The human mind is difficult enough to plumb; I fear I cannot look into an ape's mentality and see the thoughts he thinks, *mon vieux.* When he had stolen Mademoiselle Lefètre and borne her to the ruined chapel of the suicides the ape turned rebel. He did not go back to his cage as he was wont to do, but set out on another expedition. His small mind worked in circles. Twice he had taken women from the Shelton School, he

seems to have enjoyed the pastime, so went back for more. He paused upon the roof-ledge, wondering where he should seek next for victims, and to him through the damp night air the pungent scent the Sidlo girl affected came. *Voilà,* down into the room he dropped, intent on seizing her. She was well built and strongly muscled. Also she was very frightened. She did not swoon, nor struggle in his grasp, but fought him valiantly. Perhaps she hurt him with her pointed fingernails. *En tout cas,* she angered him, and so he broke her neck in peevish anger, as a child might break its doll, and, again child-like, he flung the broken toy away.

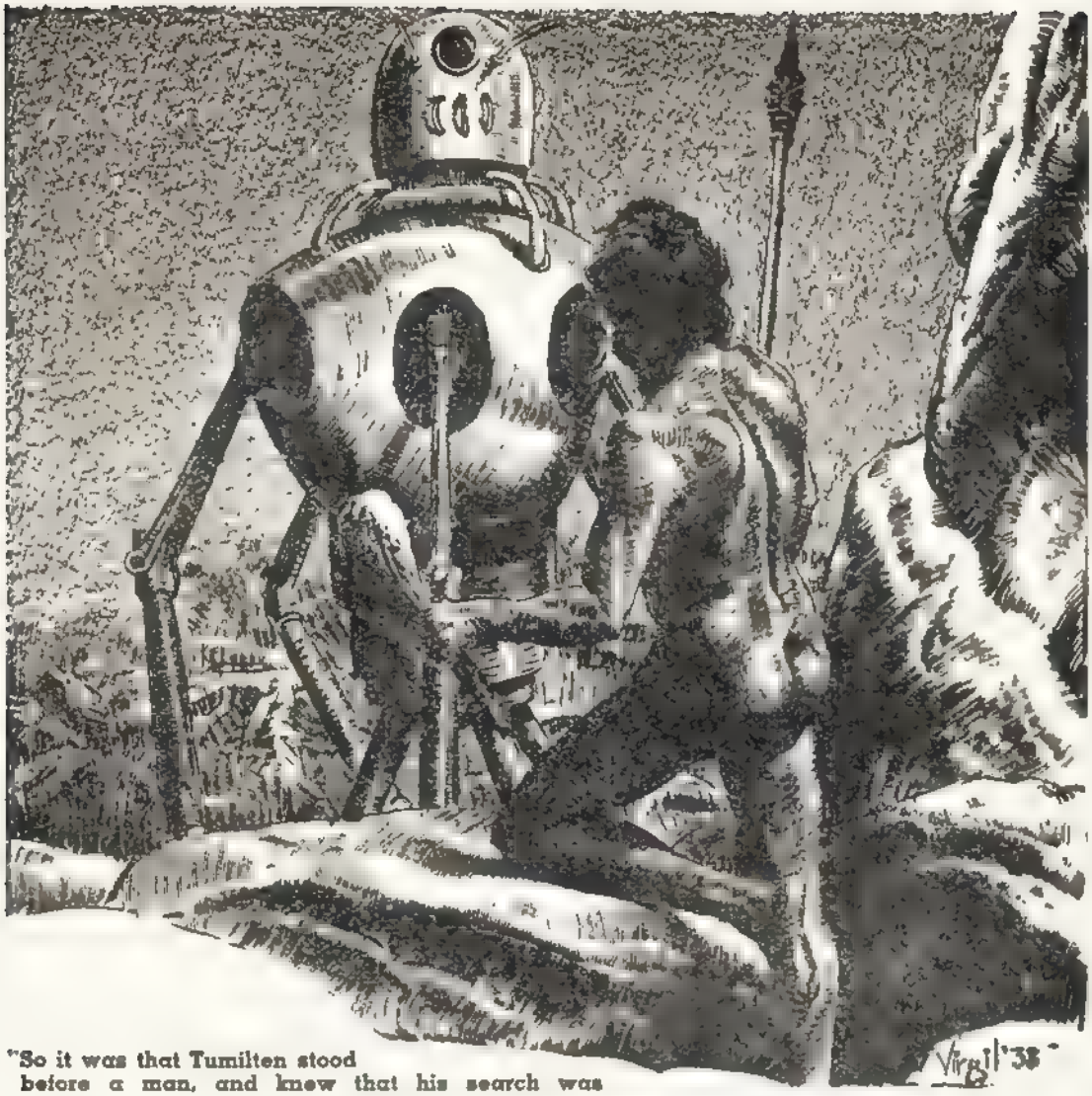
"It was a pity, too. She was so young, so beautiful, so vital. That she should die before she knew the joys of love—*morbleu,* it saddens me. Trowbridge, my friend, can you sit there thus and see me suffer so? Refill my glass, I beg you!"

The Last Hour

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

Hinged in the brooding west a black sun hung,
  And Titan shadows barred the dying world.
  The blind black oceans groped; their tendrils curled
And writhed and fell in feathered spray, and clung,
Climbing the granite ladders, rung by rung,
  Which held them from the tribes whose death-cries skirled.
  Above, unholy fires red wings unfurled—
Gray ashes floated down from where they swung.

A demon crouched, chin propped on brutish fist,
  Gripping a crystal ball between his knees;
    His skull-mouth gaped, and icy shone his eye.
  Down crashed the crystal globe—beneath the seas
The dark lands sank—lone in a fire-shot mist
    A painted sun hung in a starless sky.



"So it was that Tumilten stood before a man, and knew that his search was ended."

From the Beginning

By EANDO BINDER

An utterly strange tale, about a race of reasoning robots with radium brains, and the origin of the human race on Earth

MY COMPANION in this tale William Walker, helped me with the writing of certain episodes. I had come to his place in answer to a phone call. I sat down and looked at him quizzically, wrinkling my nose at the smell of ozone which was always in evidence in his small electrical workshop.

"Look," he said, leaning forward when our greetings were done. "What is it when mind speaks to mind without use of words?"

"Telepathy."

He nodded and waved a hand to indicate the apparatus on the work-bench before us. To my untrained eye it was just a group of adjacent coils sleeved inside one that was two feet high. The wire had been wound around cellulose cylinders. Beyond the clear walls of the inner coil, partially hidden by the turns of wire, was a three-inch metal ball, perfectly spherical, suspended in a cradle of leather strips.

"Well?" I raised my eyebrows.

"I don't know how to begin," frowned Walker. "I'm only an amateur scientist, and as such can't figure out at all why it works as it does. But I doubt if our science can explain at all. I do know this —when that metal ball is subjected to high-frequency energy, it releases thought-waves! It must have some inexplicable mechanism inside that does the trick."

"You might tell me what it is and where it came from," I suggested, utterly mystified.

Walker lit a cigarette. "You remember," he began, "that I went with the French LeConte Expedition last year which surveyed for possible irrigation of the Sahara Desert by canals dug down from the Mediterranean. And out there, in the middle of nowhere, we came across a batch of fossil bones in our digging to test underlying soil.

"Micolet, the little French fossil man, went crazy for joy. He dug up some of the precious bones and found this metal ball. We two happened to be alone at the time, and he gave it to me. It had no significance to him—only his musty bones did. I slipped it into my personal belongings, later calling it a paperweight at the customs.

"I was intrigued with the thought of this smooth metal sphere, uncorroded and showing no sign of age, having been embedded in the same clay-matrix that held the petrified bones of an extinct reptile—so Micolet said. And he's a pretty well-known paleontologist.

"After my return to the States, I began wondering about the thing. At first I was more interested in *what* it was than how it got there among fossils. I analyzed the metal; it is a strange alloy of beryllium and tantalum, two very resistant metals. A density measurement showed it was too light to be solid all through. But what, if anything, was inside? I thought of several ways to find out—dissolving the outer shell away, X-rays, even sawing into it. But one day, quite by accident, I had it near the Tesla coil, and as I turned on the current I got the shock of my life when a soundless voice seemed to hammer into my brain!

"Different sets of thought-waves are released when I change the frequency of my inductive field—almost as if it were a series of phonograph records that give off thought and vision instead of sound."

"Whose thoughts?"

"Those of someone, or something, living in a past so remote that it precedes human history!"

"Atlantis, maybe?"

"Maybe. Maybe from a time before the species of *homo sapiens* even existed!" Walker was in grim earnest, I can tell you that.

"You see," he went on, "I shan't know just how old the ball is until Micolet determines the age of his fossils, which he hasn't done yet. The thought-record itself gives no clue. If it happens to go back as far as 25,000 years——"

"Preposterous!" was my involuntary remark. Walker, I might explain, was, and still is for that matter, a believer in psychic and supermundane things, whereas I'm from Missouri.

Walker didn't seem to hear me. "The thoughts released are not very coherent," he pursued. "Either that or my mind isn't

capable of translating them. It is not a voice, but a swift series of mental images combined with sound and thought, so detailed that they give every variation of what seems to be an elaborate story. But it doesn't seem to have any coherence or logic or—perspective. So I have you here on the hunch that with *both* of us listening at once, the images will be clearer."

"Huh—why?"

Walker smiled a little sheepishly. "Well, my theory is that two minds give perspective to thought-waves. It takes two ears to orientate sound, two eyes to judge distance, why not two minds to translate telepathized thought-imagery?"

With a strange look on his sensitive face, Walker eagerly arranged two chairs in front of the apparatus, explaining that our heads—our brains—had to be fairly close to the metal ball to catch its radiations. He then knifed a switch from which insulated wires ran to a large high-voltage transformer in the room's corner. A low moan arose. Then, when we had seated ourselves with the three-inch ball just in front of our noses, visible beyond the clear cellulose, Walker snapped a switch that led current through his primary.

I had waited expectantly, hardly knowing what to expect. I jumped as a pulse seemed to beat in my brain.

"That's just a sort of carrier-wave," whispered my companion. "It's much stronger than it was when I listened alone. I think this is going to work out——"

The pulse in my brain quickened to a drone and then—so suddenly that it drew a sharp gasp into my lungs—it became a clear-cut picture. I saw a monstrous angular shape with four legs and six tentacles, following a short line of such similar beings. Overhead a fierce blue-white sun poured down a flood of rays that reflected blazingly from the metallic figure of the creature. The scene around was one of barren desert. Beyond, near the horizon, lay a confused heap of incredible architecture, sharply outlined against a deep azure sky.

With this picture came sound—the smooth whirring of well-oiled machinery. And after sound came something more—an almost complete *rapport* with another mind. . . .

* * * * *

He was the last in the line. Six million and more of the metal-bodied, mineral-brained creatures had preceded him. The brain-units of each of them had been destroyed after the precious capsule of activating radium had been removed. The radium was to be added to the stores aboard the space-ship.

Tumilten saw them open the hinged receptacle in the head of the robot in front of him, take out the small radium-phial, and then reduce the brain-unit to a molten blob with a sharp ray of heat. He shuddered mentally. That was death! A sudden erasure almost unknown among his people, except at rare times like this. Ordinarily one lived on and on, for thousands of years, till the final last "fading out," when the brain-unit had burned itself completely out with radium.

The operator of the heat ray turned his multiple eyes on Tumilten. He telepathized, "Come, you. You are the last."

No sympathy, no slightest spark of feeling. The operator had been ordered by the Council to destroy six million brain-units, and there could be no such thing as pity for those doomed. The thing the Council had stressed was that they be sure to retrieve every radium-capsule before using the heat ray.

Tumilten took one step forward, then two backward. The operator looked at him with what might have been surprize.

"Tumilten does not want to be rayed out!" said Tumilten.

"What nonsense is this?" returned the operator. "The Council commands it. You have the cross-mark of the Unchosen on your frontlet. Come here and be rayed."

Tumilten spoke for himself again: "Why should Tumilten be rayed out? He wants to live!"

"Why? Why?" snapped back the operator impatiently. "Foolish one, because there is a shortage of radium. In that long journey through space in search of a new home, only the Chosen few can be supplied with radium. These six million capsules will help to keep them renewed till they find a haven."

The telepathized voice seemed to soften a trifle from its metallic indifference. "It is nothing, Younger. A fleeting moment of heat and it is over. You were created and now you are to be uncreated. After you are rayed, the ray will be turned on its operator, who is also of the Unchosen. Come——"

But Tumilten was thinking otherwise. With a click of internal machinery he whirled, and ran; ran with the smooth speed of high-powered machinery. The operator stood for a moment in perplexity, then swung his heat ray toward the escaping robot.

Tumilten, his four triply jointed legs propelling him forward with ponderous velocity, saw the sands around him curl up and cake and run together. The heat ray was on his legs. Pain came to him, not as a physical sensation, but merely as the coded clicking of a thermocouple in his chest. It was warning him that his internal heat was reaching a dangerous point.

But he ran on, even though he knew his fuel tank might at any instant blow up and destroy him. In another moment he had gone beyond the range of the ray and was safe. He stopped then and looked back. He saw the operator stare at him impassively, then quickly raise the ray to his own head.

The operator had carried out his duty except in one detail. The escape of Tumilten was the exceptional detail.

* * * * *

We sat spellbound before the metal ball as the thought-images ended abruptly with a faint click and the pulsing carrier wave came into being. Then with a soundless click, the episode we had just witnessed began again.

Walker snapped off the current and lit a cigarette with trembling fingers.

"That was great!" he exclaimed. "Before, trying it alone, it was a meaningless jumble of superimposed impressions to me. But with our two minds—possibly *en rapport* since we were both concentrating on the one thing—we got—well, perspective. Which simply means each of us not only received the thought-message direct, but also by reflection from the other's brain."

That was just like Walker, to be more interested in rationalizing the experience we had just had, than in analyzing the phenomenon. For my part, I must confess I was awed.

"Lord!" I gasped. "It's unbelievable! We were seeing and hearing things long since done!"

"Not just seeing and hearing," said Walker, expelling a cloud of smoke to the ceiling. "That was *living* it! But then I always reasoned telepathy should be something like that. The senses are just imperfect instruments of the brain. Mind-to-mind contact—*this* sort of thing—eliminates the clumsier sensory means of communication. Think of it, Cliff, we've *lived* an episode in some other creature's life!"

I shook my head dazedly. "And what a creature! It wasn't human, Bill. It was a soulless, thinking machine—a robot!" I

shuddered involuntarily. "How can a wholly mechanical creature think like a human being? Present-day science wouldn't admit of a reasoning robot."

"Present-day science wouldn't admit of hypersensory telepathy either," returned Walker dryly. "Yet there we have it in that metal ball. This whole thing—we've got to make up our minds to it, no matter how fantastic—goes beyond our science. But why be as superstitious as the hard-head who said 'There ain't no such an animal' when seeing the giraffe?"

I had begun pacing the room excitedly, trying to keep from feeling that the whole world of accepted things had fallen out at the bottom. A robot! A thinking machine! Fantastic, ridiculous, impossible! I found myself shaking my head vehemently as though arguing with someone.

"What it is," said Walker soberly, "is an episodic record of the life of a creature whose race once lived on Earth—totally unsuspected by our present civilization." A yawn escaped his lips. "Come back a few more evenings and we'll run through this whole story. I'm too tired to go on tonight."

THE next evening I went early to Walker's place, eager to get on with our bizarre experiment. I had had one or two qualms through the day that I had dreamed about last night. My humdrum office routine failed to take my mind off the event.

Without preamble, Walker had me sit before the apparatus.

"I've already set the coils for a higher frequency and therefore a different episode," he informed me. "Did you notice that in the last, the whole thing seemed to have been told or narrated by someone? Maybe the series of records leads to some conclusion or denouement."

He knifed a switch. After a phonograph-like period of scratchings, the sudden panorama of mental images again sprang into our minds. I speak for Walker, for we afterward found we both *saw* the identically same things, though our interpretations of what we *heard*—by telepathy, I mean—were always to be slightly at variance.

The scene we seemed to see in front of our eyes was again desert-like. In the foreground were two of the robot creatures, conversing. Then, as before, sound came to us—the undertone of smooth, intricate machinery. Then came a gradual fusing of minds, till we no longer knew ourselves as William Walker and Cliff Darrell, but identified ourselves completely with an alien mind. . . .

* * * * *

A CLEAR bell-note rang inside the brains of the two conversing robots. Eight times it sounded.

"The eighth period," said Tumilten. "Tumilten must leave you, Zonzi, to go on duty. You will come here again tomorrow?"

"If there is not other business," returned the Elder. "Any time now the Ancients Supreme may call a Council of all Elders, in the Hall of the Twelve. When it comes, this Council will last for days. And when it is over, the plans for the great space journey will be completed."

They separated without any form of good-bye greeting. Tumilten moved his quadrupedal metal body toward the nearby city. Zonzi clambered into his small, ovoid airship and sped silently away. They had met out in the open wastes of the desert because they liked to be alone with each other.

In a few minutes Tumilten had reached the city, which housed only one kind of machinery—that for making wire. All kinds of wires were made here, cable-

thick, filament-thin, of every kind of metal, and even of non-metals, and for all uses conceivable in a completely mechanized civilization.

Tumilten stalked unhurriedly into the bowels of this hissing, thundering Vulcan city, and made his way finally down a corridor crowded with other robots. They were of all sizes and shapes, but all had the same head-pieces. And inside the solidly armored heads, all had the same brain-units.

Tumilten did a number of things that would have bewildered an organic being. In one well-stocked room he removed a small battery from his middle and replaced it with a fresh one. In another chamber he slid open a tiny door in his head and replaced the capsule of radium-salt with another. In another room an attendant removed his tentacles and replaced them with short, strong arms of steel with claws at the ends. Last of all, he poured a thick, creamy oil into cups in his shoulders.

Then, all prepared like an overhauled engine, he passed by means of various moving stairways and elevators to a gigantic room filled with sparkling, hissing, thundering machinery that would have deafened and blinded a carbonaceous creature. For a moment he stood stock-still, gazing abstractedly at the numerous mechanical figures tending these machines.

When the bell-note struck nine times in his, and in all others', brain-units, he strode on his four triply-jointed legs toward one of the machines. The robot who had been there left as soon as Tumilten had stepped before the control-system with its multitudinous levers and dials.

Then for fifty hours Tumilten tended the machine, unsweating, tireless, his reactions as quick and fresh at the end of that period as at the start. In all this he was no different from all his fellow Youngers in other cities. But in one thing, perhaps, he was different—he had the thoughts of an Elder.

Of an Elder? Perhaps the thoughts of an Ancient. Perhaps, even, thoughts new to their race altogether! For he was wondering where their race had sprung from. Their race had come from another star, it was said. But who or what had created them?

Youngers were created by Elders; these Elders by other Elders; these by others before. But where was the beginning? Who had created the first Younger? All life was creation. Therefore, who had created the first of their race? Had it been, as the legend went—even these machine-creatures had legends—that another form of life had created them? It was a secret Zonzi knew, but would not give out. It was a secret that Tumilten's super-quickened brain-unit wanted to know.

It was three work-periods later that Tumilten knew that the Elders had finished their council and had laid their final plans for search of a new home. A click in his brain-unit, and a voice spoke to him in their intricate language which was half in mathematical symbols. It was a command to leave the city of wire-machines and go immediately to the main city of the Elders.

Mechanically, without thought of questioning the strange command, Tumilten went to the city's air-exit, to find himself in company with a hundred other Youngers, all going to the same destination and obeying the same summons. Arriving at their destination, they were immediately set to work on what Tumilten knew was a giant space-ship.

These Youngers at work on the ship, drawn in small groups from every city in their closely clustered community, did not complain when their work-periods were lengthened. Nor was there any explanation. It was not till Youngers had lived for thousands of years that they sought answer to what the Elders and Ancients

commanded them to do. And by the time they sought such answers, they were ready to be made Elders.

And that marked the main fault of these mechanical creatures — a tediously slow evolution of the individual mind.

The giant space-craft was completed in fifteen years. All other preparations had been in the meantime completed, and the day came when the Twelve Ancients, speaking as one, addressed the many millions of Youngers.

"Youngers, our race is to seek a new home in the void," spoke the Supreme Voice, reaching to every brain-unit by broadcast telepathy. "Unfortunately, due to radium shortage, only a chosen number can leave. All the Elders are of the Chosen, but only one million of the Youngers. Most of you Youngers must be a sacrifice to this great venture. You are to be uncreated, and your brain-units to be destroyed so that we may take along your radium capsules. A white cross-mark will be placed on the frontal plates of those not chosen."

That was all. A day later Tumilten saw the emissary of the Council pass among the ranks of Youngers, with an instrument that blazoned a white cross-mark on certain of them. It was Zonzi himself.

ZONZI raised the instrument as he came to Tumilten.

"You are not of the Chosen," he announced, with something akin to sadness in his manner. "The Council chose purely by lot."

Tumilten, of mixed reactions, said simply: "Tumilten would only wish that before the end he might know of those greater secrets of the past."

Zonzi extended a tiny square box of metal. "That was anticipated, Tumilten. Since you are to be uncreated so soon, there can be no harm in revealing the past arcana of our race. There are thought-recorded for you here all those things from the Books."

Tumilten took the tiny machine almost reverently.

Mechanical Elder looked at mechanical Younger. A spark of something unmechanical passed between them; something their hard race had known little of—personal friendship.

Then without further word, Zonzi marked the white cross on the Younger and stepped away. Tumilten watched him blazon the indelible cross on others and gradually move down the line. The Younger looked at the thought-recorder for a moment and then stuffed it into his chest storage space.

* * * * *

WHEN the images had ceased, Walker turned to me after shutting off the current.

"The chronology of these two episodes is reversed," he said. "Obviously, the first scene we saw, last night, represented the carrying out of the Council's general slaughter of the Youngers. If I increase the frequency again, I'll get a still earlier episode. I hope so, because it would probably clear up what seems to be rather mysterious goings-on right now. Another half-hundred turns on the secondary ought to do it."

As he prepared to switch in the extra coil—he had previously had a number of them ready for that purpose—I held up a hand. "Wait a minute," I pleaded. "Don't be in such a hurry about it. Let me get my breath."

"Okay," laughed Walker. He could be so calm about such things. A real, honest-to-goodness ghost materializing in his presence would simply send him scampering for a camera and an electroscope. He laughed again.

"Look," he said, displaying the last

joint of his little finger with the thumb and forefinger of his other hand. "That's how much mankind knows of the universe. Each little crumb of new knowledge we gather startles us, but if we could once perceive the body of the *All* —our present science would seem like childish puttering."

"You've said that before," I grunted. "But tell me one thing. Where does this robot race fit in the scheme of evolution?"

"Doesn't." Walker was at the window, staring out at the endless stream of traffic. "You know, this has set me thinking on that very thing. Evolution fails to account, in the last analysis, for the quite sudden uprise of intelligence. We have to assume that after Nature had fooled around with various forms of life for a half-billion years, she suddenly came up with a mutation that could reason, evolving in a short fifty or one hundred thousand years. The Survival of the Fittest angle has the paradox in it of saying that *homo* survived not because of, but *in spite of,* intelligence. Because while beetle-browed Neandertal and equally unfit Heidelberg flourished, brain meant nothing against brawn. The Mutation or Sport theory of accounting for the genus *homo,* on the other hand, doesn't easily explain where the first species *sapiens* found a mate to carry on his particular strain."

"What are you driving at?" I asked impatiently. Walker had a habit of wandering around with words.

He shrugged. "I don't know, myself. Just inner doubts I've had for a long time. But this record of a mechanical creature of at least prehistoric times may give us some startling clues."

"You mean it may have a connection with earthly life?—with man and evolution?" I snorted. "He's from some other world—some utterly alien form of life."

Little though I knew it, I was right—and wrong, too.

Walker damped his cigarette. "We'll find out soon enough. We'll tune in the next 'recording' of the metal ball. Whoever or whatever made this thought-record, made it with a purpose in mind, I'm sure of that."

He knifed a group of switches that cut another coil into his secondary, increasing the frequency of his Tesla field. Then he snapped on the generator and motioned for me to get into place.

I got into my seat with avid eagerness, wondering what further strange things would reveal themselves to us. Walker fed current into his coils. The now familiar hiss of the "carrier" wave came again. A moment later there was the sudden flash of images that carried with them sound and feeling and thought. I don't know how else to describe the very completeness of our contact in the thought-messages.

In a *rapport* that made us one with the narrator, we became aware of listening to a language of clear, lucid thought, rather than words. Every nuance of expression was understandable, as if the speaker were using the universal tongue of the atoms that compose all things. . . .

* * * * *

"WHEN this sun was a younger star," said the ultra-voice, "and all its planets had been but newly spewed from its seething, white-hot surface by the influence of a passing star, our people came from the outer void."

Tumilten, of the Youngers, listened eagerly. Zonzi of the Elders was one of the Keepers of History. His knowledge of their people's past went way back to the dim times when they had lived on the planets of another star. It was his privilege to sit periodically in council with the twelve Ancients; those twelve who had

lived on that other world, and whose ages ran into incredible figures. Yet what is time to a creature of metal?

"Housed in a gigantic space-ship," went on Zonzi, "our predecessors—including of course the Twelve—spanned the enormous void between that other star and this one, and finally landed on the ninth and outermost planet. There our race took up its normal course of existence, finding suitable minerals and materials to make replacement parts for their bodies. In a short time they began creating a group of Youngers to replace those of the Ancients who had faded out during the tremendous journey.

"Yet, though many Youngers were created, it was soon seen that their numbers would never reach the total our race had had on that other star. For of radium, the life-giving element which gives conscious being to our brain-units, there was a limited supply in this sun system.

"It was debated for a while whether to leave this radium-impoverished system and seek another, richer in this element. But the Elders of that time had had enough of age-long travel through the endless void. They did not relish the idea of again seeking and seeking through space for a sun with planets. For perhaps you know that only one out of 100,000 stars has a family of satellites."

Tumilten nodded. "Why did our race leave its other home?"

"For two reasons," replied Zonzi. "First, because all the available radium had been finally used up. And second, because the parent sun was burning out and becoming dark and cold. And without the energy of a sun to feed its many machines, the race could not thrive.

"Some there were who advocated a harnessing of the terrible power of atomic-energy to replace sun power. But after the awful explosion of an entire planet, with thousands of our people living on it, through the escaping of an atomic-power vortex, the Elders would have no more to do with such a wild, treacherous source of power. No, they must have the safe and gentle sun power, and for that they had to go out in search of a young and hot star with a family of planets."

Hardly had Zonzi paused when Tumilten came up with another eager question —"But where had our race come from previous to that? Had they come from still another star-family, again leaving a cooled and dying sun for a newer and hotter one? Or is it true—as certain legends go—that our race was created by another, a strangely non-mineral form of intelligent life?"

Zonzi waved two of his prehensile tentacles as if startled, or shocked. "Careful what you say, Tumilten," he admonished.

"But is that true?" persisted the Younger. "Your knowledge as Keeper of History comes from the lore contained in the indelible records of the Books. Surely you have read in those Books of that ultimate beginning of our race?"

Zonzi again twitched his fore-tentacles, this time as if in hesitation of what to say. If his mechanical features had been able to register emotion, he would have looked grave and thoughtful.

Finally he spoke—"There are some things in the Books it is best to leave unheralded. We, the Keepers of History, are under oath not to reveal the greater secrets of the past to the Youngers." He waved a tentacle negatively. "No, Tumilten, your question must remain unanswered."

Tumilten knew it was useless to press the point. Close though he and Zonzi were to each other, there was yet a barrier between them—the barrier between

all Elders and Youngers. The Youngers were the doers of the race, the runners of machines. The Elders were the thinkers, the ones to guide the greater destiny of the race, in company with the all-wise Ancients.

Tumilten was an anomaly as a Younger. He wanted to plumb the misted past, speculate on the equally misted future. And he wanted to think. . . .

Zonzi gazed at his companion with wonder. What strange spark existed in his brain-unit, so newly formed from cold, unreasoning mineral? He had been created but a thousand years before, and already his brain had become subtle and quickened, as if he had been an Elder of many millennia of existence.

"Well," said Tumilten at length, with a tone that among humans would have been called a sigh. "Go on, Zonzi, with the history of our race since it has been here in this star-family."

"FROM the ninth planet," continued Zonzi, "our race gradually worked inward, as the central sun slowly cooled through the ages. The eighth planet, then the seventh, and then the sixth. The sixth had no less than ten satellites of its own—tiny bodies that had been ripped from its molten surface during the cataclysmic event that had formed this family of planets. Grandchildren of the sun they were, and three of them yielded large deposits of radium, thus allowing our race to increase its numbers.

"We Youngers of that time—all Elders now—were privileged to witness one of the grandest sights of all time. It was the formation of the rings of the sixth planet. The nearest planetoid to the mother planet, hovering for long ages on the danger line, finally slipped its slowing orbit too close, and the titanic gravitation of the primary planet tore it into shredded fragments. That was a memorable sight!"

Zonzi paused in memory of it, then went on—"Time moved on, the sun cooled more, and our race moved inward to the fifth planet, the giant of them all, with nine satellites. We took up our abode on one of the planetoids, as the primary itself was too stormy and violent. But on the central planet we found large deposits of radium and we built a huge encampment for its recovery. To ward off the cyclonic, corrosive storms, we built the great counter-eddy machine, fed by the planet's inner store of heat. It still stands today, although the radium supplies are depleted. And it will stand for future ages, this great Red-spot, site of our giant counter-eddy machine.

"From the giant fifth planet, led by our race's constant need for the stronger rays of the central sun, we went to the fourth. In going there we passed the belt of asteroids, those broken pieces of a world which mark another vain attempt to harness the demoniac energy of the atom. But a few hundred years before a nameless experimenter had blown himself and an entire planet to bits.

"But to go on, our race spread itself over the fourth planet, a small one and almost barren of radium, so that we could only stay long enough to build enormous sluice-ways in which the poor ores could be worked for what little radium there was. These large sluice-ways represent a great engineering achievement. Water from the polar caps was pumped down these enormous canals, and chemicals added which caused the radium to dissolve from the heaps of sand thrown in. Then the radium-rich water was run into great vats at the junctions of the canals, and here worked for the metal itself. A great achievement."

Zonzi curled and uncurled a tentacle

before going on—"From the fourth planet we came to this, the third. And now we are faced with a shortage of radium. All the outer planets have been depleted, this planet is quite radiumless, and its satellite is scarred with our mine shafts seeking the metal.

"Our race, Tumilten, is faced with a crisis—a crisis greater than any other in our history, save one. That other crisis was when that star which was our people's previous homeland burned dim and our machines began to idle for lack of sun power. Thus our race left its age-old home to seek a new one. But at least they had sufficient radium to renew each and every brain-unit during that frightfully long journey through the void at the speed of light.

"In this present crisis, we shall not have enough. The Elders who have explored the two inner planets for radium found little. Thus, when our final plans have been laid, and the huge ark to carry us through space is built, many brain-units will have to remain—to become uncreated; to become inanimate mineral matter.

"It will be soon now that our race—those chosen—will plunge into the abysm of eternal space, to seek a new homeland among the uncounted stars."

* * * * *

THE strange thought-voice faded away and a click announced the end of that episode. I've tried to give what we heard — or absorbed mentally — as we heard it. But I find that our language is simply incapable of expressing the message's true form. At least the gist of it is there.

Walker and I blinked as though we had awakened from a deep sleep, then stared at each other in a sudden flood of amazement at what we had just heard.

"We can have a gin chaser for that," I muttered. I ran to the window, gulped in fresh air, and stared quickly around. "Just wanted to make sure Earth was still here," I added with a lame chuckle.

Walker stood staring at the metal ball in fascination.

"That thing has dynamite in it," he murmured softly; "mental dynamite—enough to blow up our civilization's pet belief that mankind is the only reasoning race ever to exist. And look at the mysteries it explains—the rings of Saturn, the Red-spot of Jupiter, the canals of Mars, the craters of the moon!"

"Not to mention the odd scarcity of radium on Earth," I added.

"I have an idea, though," continued Walker thoughtfully, "that a bigger surprize is ahead—in the episodes following. Something relating directly to human life. Have you noticed the speaker—the one who made this record—seems to be telling it from a broadened viewpoint? There are numerous allusions to the abstract, and a general comparing to 'organic' or 'carbonaceous' life. The narrator is obviously taking an analytical attitude toward the people he is telling about."

"But *who* is doing the telling?" I wanted to know.

"I think Tuformiltuten himself."

"Who?" I asked sharply. "Do you mean Tumilten?"

Walker stared at me wide-eyed for a moment, then chuckled.

"All right—Tumilten. Although I got it as Tuformiltuten! The name, if you got it, is simply a number in syllables, one up in the millions, but too condensed for us to figure out. To me it was a word that registered as two-four-million-two-ten. To you it was the slurred Two-million-ten. Anyway, whichever we call him, it is he that is telling the story, because he is analyzing himself more closely than anyone else could, and his viewpoint is from the future."

"Eh? How do you figure that?" I

asked skeptically. "I took it that the record was made as the events happened."

Walker shook his head. "No, because there are too many abstract tie-ups. In the first episode we saw, Tumilten or Tuformiltuten, called himself a philosopher in a race totally without philosophy—an obvious interpolation from afterthought."

Well, it took us ten minutes to straighten that out, because you see I hadn't got that "only philosopher in a race totally without philosophy" at all. And it turned out that the versions we had heard were somewhat different, although in broad detail they were identical. The versions I have written down are a composite of what both of us got. I will have to admit my versions were skimpier than Walker's, and I'm free in admitting that his mind is more sensitive, more embracing than mine. Thus he "heard" more.

This leads to the conclusion that the message itself is far more detailed than the human mind can interpret. Either the time-factor is different between the robot's vision of the events and ours, or his mind is simply more highly organized. I can't be the judge of that.

Walker went on with his idea, which had become almost an obsession—"Probably Tumilten—if he is truly the narrator—is bringing the series of episodes to some climax; of that I'm almost certain. Taking them in their chronological order, episode one—the last we saw—gives the history and origin of the robot race. Episode two relates Tumilten's gradual build-up of philosophy—remember it stretches out for fifteen years—from what he had heard from Zonzi. And episode three reveals that Tumilten, in escaping the universal 'uncreating,' is destined to be the last and only robot left on Earth."

Walker has that kind of mind—a keen organ that gropes behind the obvious for hidden mental delicacies.

"Now, what will be the outcome of this?" he almost whispered. "Tumilten, a strange mechanical being able to reason in the abstract, in his possession a record of dark secrets of the past. *What will result!*"

* * * * *

THE next evening I entered Walker's small electrical workshop in a curious state of bemusement.

"I say, Bill," I spoke from the doorway, "did we dream what we heard last night? And the night before? This morning when I woke up, and all through the day at the office, I kept wondering if we had really heard anything! You know, when you burned out our coil last night trying to get what would have been episode four, we got a minute of idiotic babbling from the metal ball."

"Yes, it must have a charging unit inside that holds juice for a minute or so."

"Well," I went on, "maybe *all* we heard was that same babbling, and we just imagined we had received an intelligible record! Self-hypnotism, you know."

Walker looked up witheringly. "Come in, you purple skeptic. I'll bet you're a mass of black and blue from pinching yourself."

"Well, it's easier *not* to believe."

Walker snorted. "It was easier not to believe Galileo at first, too. And Darwin, and Einstein, and all the other new ideas that ever jolted this hard-headed old world. You've heard the old saw——"

"Truth is stranger than fiction," I said in chorus with him. "I know," I went on, and I can tell you I was dead serious, "but still maybe the thing's a hoax, a trick that someone devised——"

"And then dug a hole in the middle of the Sahara Desert to bury his gadget, knowing someone by the name of Wil-

liam Walker would come along and——" Walker broke off with a growl. "Enough of that. Come here, now, and let's tune in episode four. After replacing the burned-out coil this morning, I tried to get the messages myself, but no go. It was just a jumble of flat images and twisted thoughts. It takes two minds to co-ordinate the record, as it takes two legs to walk."

A minute later we were seated entranced before the metal ball which was radiating thought-waves, in some inexplicable way, into our minds. And because the imperfections that are inherent in eyes and ears and spoken words were passed by, we were able to grasp and know things we might never have understood through the five senses.

If only I could find the words to transmit those things faithfully to paper! But there are no such words. . . .

* * * * *

TUMILTEN stood alone, of his race, on Earth!

An hour before he had watched the space-ship bearing all the Elders and Ancients, and one million of the Youngers, lift hissingly into the sky and then plunge furiously away. It would be many ages before they would land again on a world —perhaps not till millions of years had gone by. In that time the Ancients would undoubtedly die, and the Elders would become Ancients, and the Youngers, Elders. And if, by some cosmic mischance, they did not find a haven in time, they would die to the last one!

Tumilten's mechanical frame shuddered. Dying—fading out—was so unheard-of a thing among Youngers and Elders. Only the Ancients, those who had lived for almost countless eons, died, with their brain-units completely enervated. They died not for lack of radium, these Ancients, but simply because the delicate cores of their brain-units had atrophied to mineral dust.

Intricate machines, robots, though they were, these creatures from another star, and as such ageless through constant renewal of worn-out parts—yet they knew death; a long-coming but nevertheless inescapable death, that resulted from the common failing of all things purely mineral—the slow tendency of atoms to disintegrate into the dust of energy. They could renew tentacles, fuel, tiny wires, and all the conglomerate of their mechanical bodies, but they could not renew the pulsing core of their brain-units, which, although protected from all normal disintegrating agencies, could not escape the hand of time—and the falling apart of matter. Radium was but the larger symbol of what happened to *all* matter—a slow disintegration that was almost swift as measured by these long-living machine intelligences.

And in their incredibly long lives, individual evolution was correspondingly slow. As a result, the progress of the race was infinitely slower. And it came to Tumilten, standing there alone, that this was an unforgivable defect of his people. His race, his kind, had existed for a space of time measured by the births and deaths of hoary-old stars. Yet in that tremendous span of time they had not improved their lot to any extent; had not, for instance, found a way to harness atomic power, or to break from the chains of radium-restricted rejuvenation.

Their science had been a restricted science, dealing only with mechanical improvements of their machine bodies and cities. They had not pierced to the center of the earth, or explored the world of atoms. They had not tabulated the wonders of biological life, or the phenomena of sexual reproduction, or any of the other manifold mysteries of things around them. Even those great projects they had

carried out—the canals of planet four, the Red-spot on five—had been but to find radium, to create more Youngers, more machines. . . .

"Where," Tumilten asked, "where would there be another life, another race, that would have the ability to burst free the chain of the strictly material, and seek knowledge for its own sake? That would do things for the mere doing? That would even war among itself because of cross purposes that would arise from different and new ideas?"

Where was there a form of life that would display its kinship to the general universe by following the law of *change?* His own robot race, spawned eons before, was long antedated, was a static form of life that had no place in the present cosmos. This was proved alone by the fact that every 1700 years half of any given amount of *all* the radium in the universe changed into lower elements. Their race, dependent on radium for conscious life, was doomed by this mathematical progression of material change.

The law of change!

The day would come when radium would exist, in all the cosmos, in only little specks dotted here and there, and beyond gleaning. And the stars did not manufacture, in their furnace cores, radium any longer, for the balance of distributed energy between matter and space had changed . . . *change!* . . . the immutable law! . . .

Tumilten gave up his speculations suddenly. He kicked at a scurrying rodent that ran by and asked it—"Will this new life come from you? But you have no intelligence; you are just an animated carbonaceous jelly."

The little beast, attracted perhaps by the bright glint of sun on metal, stopped and sat up on a mound of earth and peered with bright little eyes at the mechanical man.

Looking into its eyes, Tumilten was vaguely stirred.

"And yet, it may be from your kind after all! I see—I see something of a dawning intelligence behind your visioning orbs. But"—he deprecated then—"will the one who has created you think of creating something *more* than you?"

And Tumilten did not know, at the time, that its creator was not a material being, and that the creator's name was Nature. . . .

* * * * *

WALKER snapped off the circuit as the carrier wave broke into our *rapport* with the thought-images, and gave me a significant look.

I've tried to give, above, as complete a version of the robot's philosophic speculations as he stood alone on Earth as possible, but there were a myriad thoughts—inarticulate ones—that were woven in this episode. Of course we ran through the various episodes several times each, but like a phonograph record, essentially the same message came through every time.

"We're getting into deeper water right along," said Walker hoarsely. He was excited. "As I suspected, there's some connection with this record and pre-human history. Don't you sense it, Cliff? I think we can prepare ourselves for some stiff shocks of one kind or another."

"Haven't we been shocked enough already?" I grunted. "I don't exactly like this chap's profound intelligence. Makes me feel small and uneducated. I feel as though I had a transparent brain, compared to his, figuratively and literally."

"That's the odd part of it," mused Walker. "That he—or it—should know so much about things in general, as if he had ransacked a library. He even hinted at knowing what evolution was, at the last. Yet, as a Younger of his race, untutored except as a mechanic and worker,

he could not know those things. Mm," he went on, "just happened to think—remember that little box Zonzi gave him when marking the white cross on his front? That must be his source of knowledge!"

And a few minutes later, the fifth episode confirmed this. It began much like the preceding episode, picturing the robot standing tirelessly, with the large white cross on his torso, and giving his mental ruminations. But one noticeable difference there was—the scenic background was no longer desert but instead luxuriant jungleland, steaming in the sun. And, more startling than that, there stood before the robot a bronzed, naked human being—a man who, despite a scraggly beard and unkempt hair, was obviously *homo sapiens!*

* * * * *

TUMILTEN had traveled. For years he had traveled, the power valves for his metal sinews renewed by a portable machine modeled from the larger ones in cities, which made liquid fuel out of sand by the use of sun-energy. He had crossed jungle and mountain, valley and desert, and had seen everywhere prolific abundance of animal life; life that he understood to be vastly different, in a material way, from his own.

These creatures he saw before they scurried away from his awesome presence were composed of carbonaceous jelly, so soft that he could push a tentacle right through their bodies. The few times he had done this, experimentally, he had been puzzled by the outpouring of a queer, thick red fluid. His alert senses told him that this watery fluid might be, to them, as his own oily fuel was to him —the means of supplying energy to their flimsy bodies.

At first Tumilten had been impatient with these jelly creatures, in his search for intelligent life. It did not occur to him that among their kind might be what he was looking for. He had seen a tremendous variety of them, from tiny, swift balls of fur to giant, thick-hided monsters that trumpeted squealingly at his approach. None of them had indicated signs of the least rational intelligence. And Tumilten thought that his search was useless.

Only one type of creature, standing one-third his own size and walking erect on two legs, showed a rudimentary intelligence. They inhabited caves, usually in small groups, and used fire. They carried hand-made implements that showed a certain dawning ingenuity of invention. But the thoughts they radiated, which Tumilten caught and read, were simple and dull. They were not far on the road to intellect.

"There," Tumilten told himself, "is the matrix from which organic evolution, as it obtained in that other star-system which Zonzi's recordings of the Books tell about, might produce truly reasoning creatures. There is a close analogy between these creatures of two different worlds, except that those who were the creatures of my race were composed of siliceous compounds instead of carbonaceous.

"The question is, when will evolution here on this planet produce a mutation with true intelligence? Perhaps not for ages yet."

But one day Tumilten had seen one of the erect, two-legged creatures with a curious aura of deliberateness in his manner. And this being, contrary to all other jelly creatures, had not fled, but had stared at him curiously. When Tumilten had taken a step forward, this being had warily, not precipitately, backed to a large stone, still staring. Once it had lifted a sharp stick, and balanced it for a moment in its hand.

All the while it showed more curiosity than fear, emotions that Tumilten had come to recognize, but not analyze.

Intrigued by this strange being, Tumilten had approached very close and read its thoughts. And thereupon Tumilten knew he was facing a mind having at least the capacity of his own, even if of an entirely alien construction.

So it was that Tumilten stood before a man, and knew that his search—that search that had really begun in his mind a half-million years before while he had been among his own race — had ended. Here was life, biologically endless, thoroughly adapted to a changeable and changing environment, with an intellectual capacity beyond plumbing. This was the race that would rise above the material, would develop philosophy, science and thought beyond the limits of its humble birth. It had spawned in the jungle—it would reach to the stars.

Tumilten concentrated his thought, radiated it to the man-being in simple nuances of expression — "Man, are you afraid of Tumilten?"

"Not afraid, but amazed," came back in thought articulation. "I have never seen your like before."

"Tumilten is not a creature like you," returned the robot. "He is of another world—another sphere of the universe."

"You are from the stars?" The Man pointed upward—"From there? But *who* are you?"

"The number is meaningless, but he is Tumilten. He is of that kind of life which came before you. His race is that which could only exist properly before this time in the universe. Your race will inherit the planets his race has ravished of radium."

The Man's mind was befogged at these things. He touched his spear-head, which was of metal. "You are made of this. Are you indestructible, and how long have you lived?"

"Tumilten has lived for thousands of years, and is indestructible to the extent that nothing living can harm him."

What was that curious emotion that came up in the man-creature then? That queer awe and reverence?

"Then you are a—a god!" said the Man.

"God? God? Oh, that is perhaps your thought for robot. Well, if Tumilten is what you call a god, he is the only one, as all the others have left this earth."

"You are The God, then!" said the Man, again with awe. "What is that large white cross on your front—what does that mean?"

Tumilten answered, amazed at the man-creature's insatiable curiosity, and at the same time pleased, for curiosity denoted intelligence. "This cross was emblazoned on Tumilten's frontlet to indicate that he must be destroyed when the Chosen left this world. But, as you see, Tumilten was not destroyed."

"That cross meant you should be—killed?" returned the Man, puzzled. "Yet you are here. You were not killed!"

"Tumilten was not destroyed."

"You are Tumilten, though!"

"Yes, Tumilten is—Tumilten."

The man-creature frowned. These things were not quite clear to him. At times he looked at the robot with awed eyes. An odd series of thoughts ran through his mind, jumbling up the conceptions of the white cross, god, Tumilten is Tumilten, indestructibility and longevity of the robot.

Tumilten spoke again—"Man, do you know that you are at the beginning of a great race? Since you are the first Tumilten has found in many years of wandering, you shall be called the One-Man.

Your mate will be called the One-Woman."

"But I have no mate!" returned the Man, shaking his head dejectedly. "I cannot mate with those shaggy women in the caves—even though my mother was one of them."

"I know you have not found a mate," said Tumilten. "You are a biological sport, a mutation, one that would ordinarily die out unless a similar sport of the other sex is found for you. There must be dozens, perhaps hundreds, of your type on earth, and must have been for years, but the chances of mutations meeting are so small that it might not occur the first time for thousands of years yet. Therefore, Tumilten will search out a mate for you, though it takes years."

"You will find me a mate? A woman as straight of body as I, as hairless, as round of skull?" queried the Man.

"Yes, one who will reproduce with you and give rise to the race that will one day surpass Tumilten and his race tenfold."

The man-creature stared in amazement. "Tumilten *is* a god!" he cried.

Tumilten, though puzzled, did not try to clear up the mix-up at that time. Later, he was to find it a point on which he and the man, and his mate, could not agree. Nor with the later man-creatures he was to find, and the mates he found for them, could he establish a rational basis of understanding as to who and what he was.

There was a peculiar twist in the man-mind that made it idealize more than rationalize. Later progress would either eliminate this quality, or make of it something beyond the scope of a robot mind. One question was ever to recur to Tumilten, yet never quite answer itself—"What is that thought-word 'god'?"

* * * * *

We — Walker and I — started as though awakening from a dream when the thought-record clicked off there. The above account dissatisfies me. In a way, it records the message that radiated to our brains from the metal ball. But it fails miserably to carry the full import. It is sketchy, even a little ridiculous. I've tried to rewrite it, but each version is as incomplete, as imperfect of the real thing, as this one. So this one will have to stand.

Walker cleared his throat, after snapping off the current.

"That," he jerked out, "is what they call a revelation!"

As for me, I was all in pieces. I was actually panting.

"I—I can't believe it!" I stammered. "It's preposterous! A trick of some kind. Are we supposed to have witnessed a sort of rehearsed play enacted 25,000 years ago? The origin of human life? Adam and Eve, so to speak?"

"Why not?" My friend's eyes were shining. "We have witnessed the original of the first of all fables—that of Man's creation. We saw not Adam and Eve, but the One-Man and the One-Woman, whereas Adam and Eve may have been a later couple brought together by Tumilten. It's the new Genesis, or rather, the old explained. The Biblical Adam-and-Eve story is history, not religion, remember that. Anyway, the first-man and first-woman story is not solely a Biblical story at all. Think of the fable of Prometheus and Pandora in Greek mythology. Then in the Vedas of India, Brahma and his four sons, who were given wives from Heaven. In Northern mythology, there are Aske and Embla, the progenitors of the human race. They all bear the curious relationship that the man in each case was *given* a wife, respectively by Jehovah, Jupiter, Brahma, and Odin. A story that is so universal and has so many points in common makes it a historical fact. What we have heard and seen here gives the true picture of these many versions."

"Huh," I grunted. "This version is

more fantastic than all the others put together. Tell me this, why that ambiguous phrase 'Tumilten is Tumilten'?"

I thought I had him there. I wanted to trip him up on little details and make him admit the whole thing was crazy. But he answered quick as a flash:

"Because the robot Tumilten had no conception of the pronoun 'I'. Think once—all through the records it did not once refer to itself except by name or in the third person. To himself, he was not *himself,* but simply Tumilten!"

Walker reflected a moment. "That brings up the curious thought that the conception of 'I'—my existence of myself separate from the universe at large—is a purely human invention. The robot people did not recognize a fundamental individuality. Perhaps each thought of himself as abstractly as you think of your pared finger-nail."

I am giving you everything Walker said not as gospel truth, but just as his way of explaining things. I don't agree with him at all. How do I explain it all? I don't—can't. I firmly believe there is no explanation—not any reasonable one.

"I can't follow that fancy metaphysics," I growled. "But let me tell you something—there's one thing very odd about that whole series of records. Tumilten—or whoever really made it—was holding back a lot. He seemed to be telling just certain things, as if to get our reactions for his own benefit. But of course the record was made plenty long ago, so—*look out!*"

Walker, in the act of lighting a cigarette, had let the match burn to his finger-tips. He flung it down slowly, and damped the unlighted cigarette carefully as though it had been burning. His face was deeply thought-creased.

"Cliff——"

"No, I'm going. I can see you have a spell of fantastic theories coming on. Besides, I have to sleep this off—worse than drugs——"

Still mumbling, I left, leaving Walker in a trance.

"I STILL don't believe it!" were my words of greeting the next evening.

Walker raised a face that showed by its haggardness that he had been up all the past twenty-four hours. "Cliff," he said, "I got a letter from Micolet, the paleontologist who found the metal ball. They have finally determined the age of the clay-matrix in which the thing was found. The fossils cannot be less than 25,000 years old!"

"I don't believe that either!" I said stubbornly. I was in a completely disbelieving mood.

Walker held up a flask in which two gold leaves hung suspended from a conductor rod running through a rubber cork. "This is an electroscope," he explained. "It indicates the electrical charge of any object, or of the air surrounding the conductor rod. When I hold it near that metal ball from which we got our records, *the leaves fly apart!*"

"Huh," I said. "The metal ball is charged."

"No, the air around it is, because there's radium inside!"

"And——?"

"Don't you see, Cliff?" cried Walker, jumping to his feet. "It means that metal ball is not just any mechanism, but is the very mechanism that the robot people called a brain-unit!"

I gulped. "That is—Tumilten's own *brain?*"

Walker nodded excitedly. "You gave me the hint last night, saying the records seemed to be created on the spot, for us. Stupidly, I puzzled over that for hours before thinking of a way to prove it, simply with an electroscope to detect the radium."

"But the radium must have been burned out in 25,000 years!"

"You forget that only *half* of any given amount of radium burns out every 1,700 years. Most of it is gone, but about 1/30 of it is still active, *enough to keep that mechanical brain at least partially alive!*"

"Good God! Alive?"

"Yes, the body had long rusted away, as have all the cities of the robot people in the past 25,000 years, so that nothing remains of them but that one metal ball, made of an incredibly resistant alloy."

"Good God! Alive!" I gasped again. I picked up the metal ball gingerly, lying on the work-bench, and looked at it wide-eyed. A brain—a mechanical brain 25,000 years old—and alive!"

"Bill!" I faced about suddenly. "Bill, if we found a way to open it and put in more radium—wouldn't it really come to life?"

"It would, except for one thing," said Walker. *"It died this morning!"*

"Died!"

"Yes. Whether the waning emanations finally ceased to nourish it, or the effects of the high-frequency field gradually disrupted it, or whether, somehow, it *wanted* to die, I don't know. But it is completely dead to the Tesla field. We might have heard much more — there must be far more that it had to tell, this ancient brain of metal—but it will remain a secret for ever!"

Curiously enough, my thought at the moment was, "And better so!"

Walker's epitaphal comment was appropriate: "He told us the first story ever to be told among the human race, in a different way."

Yes, and from the beginning!

H. P. Lovecraft

By FRANK BELKNAP LONG, Jr.

The many now who see in you a glass
  Held steadily against the outer dark,
Where Memphian shadows throng, and glories pass,
  Illumined by the Eternal's fitful spark,
Glimpse but one facet of a wondrous light
  That fell miraculously on Earth's harsh shores,
And shed a radiance on the Spirit's flight,
  That turned the priests of Mammon from our doors.

To the high mountain peaks your vision soared;
  Across the glacial green which links the world
Of splendid dreaming with the night's unfurled,
  And eon-wide pinions by the blind abhorred.

Sublimer beauty never dwelt with Poe,
Or walked with Shelley in the white dawn's glow.

"Get out!" cried Varduk again. "By what power do you come for your victim now?"

The Black Drama

By GANS T. FIELD

A strange weird story about the eery personality known as Varduk, who claimed descent from Lord Byron, and the hideous doom that stalked in his wake

Powers, passions, all I see in other beings,
Have been to me as rain unto the sands
Since that all-nameless hour.
—Lord Byron: *Manfred.*

Foreword

UNLIKE most actors, I do not consider my memoirs worth the attention of the public. Even if I did so consider them, I have no desire to carry my innermost dear secrets to market. Often and often I have flung aside the autobiography of some famous man or woman, crying aloud: "Surely this is the very nonpareil of bad taste!"

Yet my descendants—and, after certain despairful years, again I have hope of descendants—will want to know something

about me. I write this record of utterly strange happenings while it is yet new and clear in my mind, and I shall seal it and leave it among my important possessions, to be found and dealt with at such time as I may die. It is not my wish that the paper be published or otherwise brought to the notice of any outside my immediate family and circle of close friends. Indeed, if I thought that such a thing would happen I might write less frankly.

Please believe me, you who will read; I know that part of the narrative will strain any credulity, yet I am ready with the now-threadbare retort of Lord Byron, of whose works more below: "Truth is stranger than fiction." I have, too, three witnesses who have agreed to vouch for the truth of what I have set down. Their only criticism is that I have spoken too kindly of them. If anything, I have not spoken kindly enough.

Like Peter Quince in *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* I have rid my prolog like a rough colt. Perhaps, like Duke Theseus, you my readers will be assured thereby of my sincerity.

Signed,
GILBERT CONNATT,
New York City
August 1, 1938

We, the undersigned, having read the appended statement of Gilbert Connatt, do hereby declare it to be true in substance.

Signed,
SIGRID HOLGAR
KEITH HILARY PURSUIVANT
JACOB A. SWITZ

1. Drafted

THE counterman in the little hamburger stand below Times Square gazed at me searchingly.

"Haven't I seen you somewhere?" he asked, and when I shook my head he made a gesture as of inspiration. "I got it, buddy. There was a guy in a movie like you—tall, thin—black mustache and eyes——"

"I'm not in pictures," I told him, quite truthfully as concerned the moment. "Make me a double hamburger."

"And coffee?"

"Yes." Then I remembered that I had but fifteen cents, and that double hamburgers cost a dime. I might want a second sandwich. "Make it a single instead."

"No, a double," piped somebody at my elbow, and a short, plump figure climbed upon the next stool. "Two doubles, for me and my friend here, and I'm paying. Gilbert Connatt, at half-past the eleventh hour I run onto you by the luck of the Switzes. I am glad to see you like an old father to see his wandering boy."

I had known that voice of old in Hollywood. Turning, I surveyed the fat, blob-nosed face, the crossed eyes behind shell-rimmed glasses, the thick, curly hair, the ingratiating smile. "Hello, Jake," I greeted him without enthusiasm.

Jake Switz waved at the counterman. "Two coffees with those hamburgers." His strange oblique gaze shifted back to me. "Gib, to me you are more welcome than wine at a wedding. In an uptown hotel who do you think is wondering about you with tears in her eyes as big as electric light bulbs?" He shrugged and extended his palms, as if pleased at being able to answer his own question. "Sigrid Holgar!"

I made no reply, but drew a frayed shirt-cuff back into the worn sleeve of my jacket. Jake Switz continued: "I've been wondering where to get hold of you, Gib. How would you like again to play leading man for Sigrid, huh?"

It is hard to look full into cross-eyes, but I managed it. "Go back to her," I

bade him, "and tell her I'm not taking charity from somebody who threw me down."

Jake caught my arm and shook it earnestly. "But that ain't true, Gib. It's only that she's been so successful she makes you look like a loser. Gib, you know as well as you know your own name that it was you that threw her down—so hard she ran like a silver dollar."

"I won't argue," I said, "and I won't have charity."

I meant that. It hurt to think of Sigrid and myself as we had been five years ago—she an inspired but unsure newcomer from Europe, I the biggest star on the biggest lot in the motion picture industry. We made a film together, another, became filmdom's favorite lovers on and off screen. Then the quarrel; Jake was wrong, it was Sigrid's fault. Or was it? Anyway, she was at the head of the class now, and I had been kicked away from the foot.

The counterman set our sandwiches before us. I took a hungry bite and listened to Jake's pleadings.

"It would be you doing her and me a favor, Gib. Listen this one time—please, to give Jake Switz a break." His voice quavered earnestly. "You know that Sigrid is going to do a stage play."

"I've read about it in *Variety,*" I nodded. "Horror stuff, isn't it? Like *Dracula,* I suppose, with women fainting and nurses dragging them out of the theater."

"Nurses!" repeated Jake Switz scornfully. "Huh, doctors we'll need. At our show Jack Dempsey himself would faint dead away on the floor, it's so horrible!" He subsided and began to beg once more. "But you know how Sigrid is. Quiet and restrained—a genius. She wouldn't warm up, no matter what leading man we suggested. Varduk, the producer, mentioned you. 'Get Gilbert Connatt,' he said to me. 'She made a success with him once, maybe she will again.' And right away Sigrid said yes."

I went on eating, then swallowed a mouthful of scalding coffee. Jake did the same, but without relish. Finally he exploded into a last desperate argument.

"Gib, for my life I can't see how you can afford to pass it up. Here you are, living on hamburgers——"

I whirled upon him so fiercely that the rest of the speech died on his open lips. Rising, I tossed my fifteen cents on the counter and started for the door. But Jake yelled in protest, caught my shoulder and fairly wrestled me back.

"No, no," he was wailing. "Varduk would cut my heart out and feed it to the sparrows if I found you and lost you again. Gib, I didn't mean bad manners. I don't know nothing about manners, Gib, but have I ever treated you wrong?"

I had to smile. "No, Jake. You're a creature of instincts, and the instincts are rather better than the reasonings of most people. I think you're intrinsically loyal." I thought of the years he had slaved for Sigrid, as press agent, business representative, confidential adviser, contract maker and breaker, and faithful hound generally. "I'm sorry myself, Jake, to lose my temper. Let's forget it."

He insisted on buying me another double hamburger, and while I ate it with unblunted appetite he talked more about the play Sigrid was to present.

"Horror stuff is due for a comeback, Gib, and this will be the start. A lovely, Gib. High class. Only Sigrid could do it. Old-fashioned, I grant you, but not a grain of corny stuff in it. It was written by that English guy, Lord Barnum—no, Byron. That's it, Lord Byron."

"I thought," said I, "that there was some question about the real authorship."

"So the papers say, but they holler 'phony' at their own grandmothers. Var-

duk is pretty sure. He knows a thing or two, that Varduk. You know what he is going to do? He is getting a big expert to read the play and make a report." Jake, who was more press agent than any other one thing, licked his good-humored lips. "What a bust in the papers that will be!"

Varduk. . . . I had heard that name, that single name whereby a new, brilliant and mysteriously picturesque giant of the theatrical world was known. Nobody knew where he had come from. Yet, hadn't Belasco been a riddle? And Ziegfeld? Of course, they had never courted the shadows like Varduk, had never refused to see interviewers or admirers. I meditated that I probably would not like Varduk.

"Send me a pass when your show opens," I requested.

"But you'll be in it, Gib. Passes of your own you'll be putting out. Ha! Listen this once while I try to do you good in spite of yourself, my friend. You can't walk out after eating up the hamburgers I bought."

He had me there. I could not muster the price of that second sandwich, and somehow the shrewd little fellow had surmised as much. He chuckled in triumph as I shrugged in token of surrender.

"I knew you would, Gib. Now, here." He wrote on a card. "This is Varduk's hotel and room number. Be there at eight o'clock tonight, to read the play and talk terms. And here."

His second proffer was a wad of money.

"Get some clothes, Gib. With a new suit and tie you'll look like a million dollars come home to roost. No, no. Take the dough and don't worry. Ain't we friends? If you never pay me back, it will be plenty soon eonugh."

He beamed my thanks away. Leaving the hamburger stand, we went in opposite directions.

2. *Byron's Lost Play*

I DID not follow Jake's suggestion exactly. Instead of buying new garments throughout, I went to the pawnshop where I had of late raised money on the remnants of a once splendid wardrobe. Here I redeemed a blue suit that would become me best, and a pair of hand-made Oxfords. Across the street I bought a fresh shirt and necktie. These I donned in my coffin-sized room on the top floor of a cheap hotel. After washing, shaving and powdering, I did not look so bad; I might even have been recognized as the Gilbert Connatt who made history in the lavish film version of *Lavengro,* that classic of gipsydom in which a newcomer named Sigrid Holgar had also risen to fame. . . .

I like to be prompt, and it was eight o'clock on the stroke when I tapped at the door of Varduk's suite. There was a movement inside, and then a cheerful voice: "Who's there?"

"Gilbert Connatt," I replied.

The lock scraped and the door opened. I looked into the handsome, ruddy face of a heavy, towering man who was perhaps a year younger than I and in much better physical condition. His was the wide, good-humored mouth, the short, straight nose of the Norman Scot. His blond hair was beginning to grow thin and his blue eyes seemed anxious.

"Come in, Mr. Connatt," he invited me, holding out his broad hand. "My name's Davidson — Elmo Davidson." And, as I entered, "This is Mr. Varduk." He might have been calling my attention to a prince royal.

I had come into a parlor, somberly decorated and softly lighted. Opposite me, in a shadowed portion, gazed a pallid face. It seemed to hang, like a mask, upon the dark tapestry that draped the wall. I was aware first of a certain light-

giving quality within or upon that face, as though it were bathed in phosphorescent oil. It would have been visible, plain even, in a room utterly dark. For the rest there were huge, deep eyes of a color hard to make sure of, a nose somewhat thick but finely shaped, a mouth that might have been soft once but now drew tight as if against pain, and a strong chin with a dimple.

"How do you do, Mr. Connatt," said a soft, low voice, and the mask inclined politely. A moment later elbows came forward upon a desk, and I saw the rest of the man Varduk start out of his protective shadows. His dark, double-breasted jacket and the black scarf at his throat had blended into the gloom of the tapestry. So had his chestnut-brown curls. As I came toward him, Varduk rose—he was of middle height, but looked taller by reason of his slimness—and offered me a slender white hand that gripped like a smith's tongs.

"I am glad that you are joining us," he announced cordially, in the tone of a host welcoming a guest to dinner. "Miss Holgar needs old friends about her, for her new stage adventure is an important item in her splendid career. And this," he dropped his hand to a sheaf of papers on the desk, "is a most important play."

Another knock sounded at the door, and Elmo Davidson admitted a young woman, short and steady-eyed. She was Martha Vining, the character actress, who was also being considered for a rôle in the play.

"Only Miss Holgar to come," Davidson said to me, with a smile that seemed to ask for friendship. "We've only a small cast, you know; five."

"I am expecting one more after Miss Holgar," amended Varduk, and Davidson made haste to add: "That's right, an expert antiquary — Judge Keith Pursuivant. He's going to look at our manuscript and say definitely if it is genuine."

Not until then did Varduk invite me to sit down, waving me to a comfortable chair at one end of his desk. I groped in my pockets for a cigarette, but he pressed upon me a very long and very good cigar.

"I admire tobacco in its naked beauty," he observed with the wraith of a smile, and himself struck a match for me. Again I admired the whiteness of his hand, its pointed fingers and strong sensitivity of outline. Such hands generally betoken nervousness, but Varduk was serene. Even the fall of his fringed lids over those plumbless eyes seemed a deliberate motion, not an unthought wink.

Yet again a knock at the door, a brief colloquy and an ushering in by Elmo Davidson. This time it was Sigrid.

I got to my feet, as unsteady as a half-grown boy at his first school dance. Desperately I prayed not to look so moved as I felt. As for Sigrid, she paused and met my gaze frankly, with perhaps a shade's lightening of her gently tanned cheeks. She was a trifle thinner than when I had last seen her five years ago, and wore, as usual, a belted brown coat like an army officer's. Her hair, the blondest unbleached hair I have ever known, fell to her shoulders and curled at its ends like a full-bottomed wig in the portrait of some old cavalier. There was a green flash in it, as in a field of ripened grain. Framed in its two glistening cascades, her face was as I had known it, tapering from brow to chin over valiant cheekbones and set with eyes as large as Varduk's and bluer than Davidson's. She wore no make-up save a touch of rouge upon her short mouth—cleft above and full below, like a red heart. Even with low-heeled shoes, she was only two inches shorter than I.

"Am I late?" she asked Varduk, in that deep, shy voice of hers.

"Not a bit," he assured her. Then he

saw my awkward expectation and added, with monumental tact for which I blessed him fervently, "I think you know Mr. Gilbert Connatt."

Again she turned to me. "Of course," she replied. "Of course I know him. How do you do, Gib?"

I TOOK the hand she extended and, greatly daring, bent to kiss it. Her fingers fluttered against mine, but did not draw away. I drew her forward and seated her in my chair, then found a backless settee beside her. She smiled at me once, sidewise, and took from my package the cigarette I had forsaken for Varduk's cigar.

A hearty clap on my shoulder and a cry of greeting told me for the first time that little Jake Switz had entered with her.

Varduk's brief but penetrating glance subdued the exuberant Jake. We turned toward the desk and waited.

"Ladies and gentlemen," began Varduk, seriously but not heavily, "a new-found piece of Lord Byron's work is bound to be a literary sensation. We hope also to make a theatrical sensation, for our new-found piece is a play.

"A study of Lord Byron evokes varied impressions and appeals. Carlyle thought him a mere dandy, lacking Mr. Brummel's finesse and good humor, while Goethe insisted that he stood second only to Shakespeare among England's poets. His mistress, the Countess Guiccioli, held him literally to be an angel; on the other hand, both Lamartine and Southey called him Satan's incarnation. Even on minor matters—his skill at boxing and swimming, his depth of scholarship, his sincerity in early amours and final espousal of the Greek rebels—the great authorities differ. The only point of agreement is that he had color and individuality."

He paused and picked up some of the papers from his desk.

"We have here his lost play, *Ruthven.* Students know that Doctor John Polidori wrote a lurid novel of horror called *The Vampire,* and that he got his idea, or inspiration, or both, from Byron. Polidori's tale in turn inspired the plays of Nodier and Dumas in French, and of Planché and Boucicault in English. Gilbert and Sullivan joked with the story in *Ruddigore,* and Bram Stoker read it carefully before attempting *Dracula.* This manuscript," again he lifted it, "is Byron's original. It is, as I have said, a drama."

His expressive eyes, bending upon the page in the dimness, seemed to shed a light of their own. "I think that neither Mr. Connatt nor Miss Vining has seen the play. Will you permit me to read?" He took our consent for granted, and began: "Scene, Malvina's garden. Time, late afternoon—Aubrey, sitting at Malvina's feet, tells his adventures."

Since *Ruthven* is yet unpublished, I take the liberty of outlining it as I then heard it for the first time. Varduk's voice was expressive, and his sense of drama good. We listened, intrigued and then fascinated, to the opening dialog in which young Aubrey tells his sweetheart of his recent adventures in wildest Greece. The blank verse struck me, at least, as being impressive and not too stiff, though better judges than I have called Byron unsure in that medium. Varduk changed voice and character for each rôle, with a skill almost ventriloquial, to create for us the illusion of an actual drama. I found quite moving Aubrey's story of how bandits were beaten off single-handed by his chance acquaintance, Lord Ruthven. At the point where Aubrey expresses the belief that Ruthven could not have survived the battle:

"I fled, but he remained; how could one man,
Even one so godly gallant, face so many?
He followed not. I knew that he was slain——"

At that point, I say, the first surprize comes with the servant's announcement that Ruthven himself has followed his traveling companion from Greece and waits, whole and sound, for permission to present himself.

No stage directions or other visualization; but immediate dialog defines the title rôle as courtly and sinister, fascinating and forbidding. Left alone with the maid-servant, Bridget, he makes unashamed and highly successful advances. When he lifts the cap from her head and lets her hair fall down, it reminds one that Byron himself had thus ordered it among the maids on his own estate. Byron had made love to them, too; perhaps some of Ruthven's speeches in this passage, at least, came wholemeal from those youthful conquests.

Yet the seduction is not a gay one, and smacks of bird and snake. When Ruthven says to Bridget,

"You move and live but at my will; dost hear?"

and she answers dully:

"I hear and do submit,"

awareness rises of a darkling and menacing power. Again, as Aubrey mentions the fight with the bandits, Ruthven dismisses the subject with the careless,

"I faced them, and who seeks my face seeks death,"

one feels that he fears and spares an enemy no more than a fly. And, suddenly, he turned his attentions to Malvina:

"Yes, I am evil, and my wickedness
Draws to your glister and your purity.
Now shall you light no darkness but mine own,
An orient pearl swathed in a midnight pall——"

Oscar, husband of the betrayed Bridget, rushes in at this point to denounce Ruthven and draw away his bemused mistress. At a touch from the visitor's finger, Oscar falls dead. Aubrey, arming himself with a club of whitethorn—a sovereign weapon against demons—strikes Ruthven down. Dying, the enchanter persuades Aubrey and Malvina to drag him into the open and so leave him. As the moon rises upon his body, he moves and stands up:

"Luna, my mother, fountain of my life,
Once more thy rays restore me with their kiss.
Grave, I reject thy shelter! Death, stand back!...

"Curtain," said Varduk suddenly, and smiled around at us.

"So ends our first act," he continued in his natural voice. "No date—nor yet are we obliged to date it. For purposes of our dramatic production, however, I intend to lay it early in the past century, in the time of Lord Byron himself. Act Two," and he picked up another section of the manuscript, "begins a century later. We shall set it in modern times. No blank verse now—Byron cleverly identifies his two epochs by offering his later dialog in natural prose. That was the newest of new tricks in his day."

Again he read to us. The setting was the same garden, with Mary Aubrey and her cousin Swithin, descendants of the Aubrey and Malvina of the first act, alternating between light words of love and attentions to the aged crone Bridget. This survivor of a century and more croaks out the fearsome tale of Ruthven's visit and what followed. Her grandson Oscar, Mary's brother, announces a caller.

The newcomer explains that he has inherited the estate of Ruthven, ancient foe of the Aubreys, and that he wishes to make peace. But Bridget, left alone with him, recognizes in him her old tempter, surviving ageless and pitiless. Oscar, too, hears the secret, and is told that this is his grandfather. Bit by bit, the significance of a dead man restless after a century grows in the play and upon the servants. They swear slavishly to help him. He seeks a double and sinister goal. Swithin, image of his great-grandfather Aubrey, must die for that ancestor's former triumph over Ruthven. Mary, the

later incarnation of Malvina, excites Ruthven's passion as did her ancestress.

Then the climax. Malvina, trapped by Ruthven, defies him, then offers herself as payment for Swithin's life. Swithin, refusing the sacrifice, thrusts Ruthven through with a sword, but to no avail. Oscar overpowers him, and the demoniac lord pronounces the beginning of a terrible curse; but Mary steps forward as if to accept her lover's punishment. Ruthven revokes his words, blesses her. As the Almighty's name issues from his lips, he falls dead and decaying.

"End of the play," said Varduk. "I daresay you have surmised what rôles I plan for you. Miss Holgar and Mr. Connatt are my choices for Malvina and Aubrey in the first act, and Mary and Swithin in the second. Miss Vining will create the rôle of Bridget, and Davidson will undertake the two Oscars."

"And Ruthven?" I prompted, feeling unaccountably presumptuous in speaking uninvited.

Varduk smiled and lowered his fringed lids. "The part is not too difficult," he murmured. "Ruthven is off stage more than on, an influence rather than a flesh-and-blood character. I shall honor myself with this title rôle."

Switz, sitting near me, produced a watch. We had been listening to the play for full two hours and a half.

Again a knock sounded at the door. Davidson started to rise, but Varduk's slender hand waved him down.

"That will be Judge Pursuivant. I shall admit him myself. Keep your seats all."

He got up and crossed the floor, walking stiffly as though he wore tight boots. I observed with interest that in profile his nose seemed finer and sharper, and that his ears had no lobes.

"Come in, Judge Pursuivant," he said cordially at the door. "Come in, sir."

3. *Enter Judge Pursuivant*

KEITH HILARY PURSUIVANT, the occultist and antiquary, was as arresting as Varduk himself, though never were two men more different in appearance and manner. Our first impression was of a huge tweed-clad body, a pink face with a heavy tawny mustache, twinkling pale eyes and a shock of golden-brown hair. Under one arm he half crushed a wide black hat, while the other hand trailed a heavy stick of mottled Malacca, banded with silver. There was about him the same atmosphere of mature sturdiness as invests Edward Arnold and Victor McLaglen, and withal a friendly gayety. Without being elegant or dashing, he caught and held the regard. Men like someone like that, and so, I believe, do women who respect something beyond sleek hair and brash repartee.

Varduk introduced him all around. The judge bowed to Sigrid, smiled at Miss Vining, and shook hands with the rest of us. Then he took a seat at the desk beside Varduk.

"Pardon my trembling over a chance to see something that may have been written by Lord Byron to lie perdu for generations," he said pleasantly. "He and his works have long been enthusiasms of mine. I have just published a modest note on certain aspects of his——"

"Yes, I know," nodded Varduk, who was the only man I ever knew who could interrupt without seeming rude. "*A Defense of the Wickedest Poet* — understanding and sympathetic, and well worth the praise and popularity it is earning. May I also congratulate you on your two volumes of demonology, *Vampyricon* and *The Unknown that Terrifies?*"

"Thank you," responded Pursuivant, with a bow of his shaggy head. "And now, the manuscript of the play——"

"Is here." Varduk pushed it across the desk toward the expert.

Pursuivant bent for a close study. After a moment he drew a floor lamp close to cast a bright light, and donned a pair of pince-nez.

"The words 'by Lord Byron', set down here under the title, are either genuine or a very good forgery," he said at once. "I call your attention, Mr. Varduk, to the open capital B, the unlooped down-stroke of the Y, and the careless scrambling of the O and N." He fumbled in an inside pocket and produced a handful of folded slips. "These are enlarged photostats of several notes by Lord Byron. With your permission, Mr. Varduk, I shall use them for comparison."

He did so, holding the cards to the manuscript, moving them here and there as if to match words. Then he held a sheet of the play close to the light. "Again I must say," he announced at last, "that this is either the true handwriting of Byron or else a very remarkable forgery. Yet——"

Varduk had opened a drawer of the desk and once more he interrupted. "Here is a magnifying glass, Judge Pursuivant. Small, but quite powerful." He handed it over. "Perhaps, with its help, you can decide with more accuracy."

"Thank you." Pursuivant bent for a closer and more painstaking scrutiny. For minutes he turned over page after page, squinting through the glass Varduk had lent him. Finally he looked up again.

"No forgery here. Every stroke of the pen is a clean one. A forger draws pictures, so to speak, of the handwriting he copies, and with a lens like this one can plainly see the jagged, deliberate sketchwork." He handed back the magnifying glass and doffed his spectacles, then let his thoughtful eyes travel from one of us to the others. "I'll stake my legal and scholastic reputation that Byron himself wrote these pages."

"Your stakes are entirely safe, sir," Varduk assured him with a smile. "Now that you have agreed—and I trust that you will allow us to inform the newspapers of your opinion—that *Ruthven* is Byron's work, I am prepared to tell how the play came into my possession. I was bequeathed it—by the author himself."

We all looked up at that, highly interested. Varduk smiled upon us as if pleased with the sensation he had created.

"The germ of *Ruthven* came into being one night at the home of the poet Shelley, on the shores of Lake Geneva. The company was being kept indoors by rain and wind, and had occupied itself with reading German ghost stories, and then tried their own skill at Gothic tales. One of those impromptu stories we know — Mary Godwin's masterpiece, *Frankenstein*. Lord Byron told the strange adventures of Ruthven, and Polidori appropriated them—that we also know; but later that night, alone in his room, Byron wrote the play we have here."

"In one sitting?" asked Martha Vining.

"In one sitting," replied Varduk. "He was a swift and brilliant worker. In his sixteen years of active creative writing, he produced nearly eighty thousand lines of published verse — John Drinkwater reckons an average of fourteen lines, or the equivalent of a complete sonnet, for every day. This prodigious volume of poetry he completed between times of making love, fighting scandal, traveling, quarreling, philosophizing, organizing the Greek revolution. An impressive record of work, both in size and in its proportion of excellence."

Sigrid leaned forward. "But you said that Lord Byron himself bequeathed the play to you."

Again Varduk's tight, brief smile. "It sounds fantastic, but it happened. Byron

gave the manuscript to Claire Clairmont, his mistress and the mother of two of his children. He wanted it kept a secret—he had been called fiend incarnate too often. So he charged her that she and the children after her keep the play in trust, to be given the world a hundred years from the date of his death."

PURSUIVANT cleared his throat. "I was under the impression that Byron had only one child by Claire Clairmont, Mr. Varduk. Allegra, who died so tragically at the age of six."

"He had two," was Varduk's decisive reply. "A son survived, and had issue."

"Wasn't Claire's son by Shelley?" asked Pursuivant.

Varduk shook his curly head. "No, by Lord Byron." He paused and drew a gentle breath, as if to give emphasis to what he was going to add. Then: "I am descended from that son, ladies and gentlemen. I am the great-grandson of Lord Byron."

He sank back into his shadows once more and let his luminous face seem again like a disembodied mask against the dark tapestry. He let us be dazzled by his announcement for some seconds. Then he spoke again.

"However, to return to our play. Summer is at hand, and the opening will take place at the Lake Jozgid Theater, in July, later to come to town with the autumn. All agreed? Ready to discuss contracts?" He looked around the circle, picking up our affirmative nods with his intensely understanding eyes. "Very good. Call again tomorrow. Mr. Davidson, my assistant, will have the documents and all further information."

Jake Switz was first to leave, hurrying to telephone announcements to all the morning newspapers. Sigrid, rising, smiled at me with real warmth.

"So nice to see you again, Gib. Do not bother to leave with me—my suite is here in this hotel."

She bade Varduk good-night, nodded to the others and left quickly. I watched her departure with what must have been very apparent and foolish ruefulness on my face. It was the voice of Judge Pursuivant that recalled me to my surroundings.

"I've seen and admired your motion pictures, Mr. Connatt," he said graciously. "Shall we go out together? Perhaps I can persuade you to join me in another of my enthusiasms—late food and drink."

We made our adieux and departed. In the bar of the hotel we found a quiet table, where my companion scanned the liquor list narrowly and ordered samples of three Scotch whiskies. The waiter brought them. The judge sniffed each experimentally, and finally made his choice.

"Two of those, and soda—no ice," he directed. "Something to eat, Mr. Connatt? No? Waiter, bring me some of the cold tongue with potato salad." Smiling, he turned back to me. "Good living is my greatest pursuit."

"Greater than scholarship?"

He nodded readily. "However, I don't mean that tonight's visit with Mr. Varduk was not something to rouse any man's interest. It was full of good meat for any antiquary's appetite. By the way, were you surprized when he said that he was descended from Lord Byron?"

"Now that you mention it, I wasn't," I replied. "He's the most Byronic individual I have ever met."

"Right. Of course, the physical resemblances might be accidental, the manner a pose. But in any case, he's highly picturesque, and from what little I can learn about him, he's eminently capable as well. You feel lucky in being with him in this venture?"

I felt like confiding in this friendly,

tawny man. "Judge Pursuivant," I said honestly, "any job is a godsend to me just now."

"Then let me congratulate you, and warn you."

"Warn me?"

"Here's your whisky," he said suddenly, and was silent while he himself mixed the spirit with the soda. Handing me a glass, he lifted the other in a silent toasting gesture. We drank, and then I repeated, "Warn me, you were saying, sir?"

"Yes." He tightened his wide, intelligent mouth under the feline mustache. "It's this play, *Ruthven*."

"What about it?"

His plate of tongue and salad was set before him at this juncture. He lifted a morsel on his fork and tasted it.

"This is very good, Mr. Connatt. You should have tried some. Where were we? Oh, yes, about *Ruthven*. I was quite unreserved in my opinion, wasn't I?"

"So it seemed when you offered to stake your reputation on the manuscript being genuine."

"So I did," he agreed, cutting a slice of tongue into mouthfuls. "And I meant just that. What I saw of the play was Byronic in content, albeit creepy enough to touch even an occultist with a shiver. The handwriting, too, was undoubtedly Byron's. Yet I felt like staking my reputation on something else."

He paused and we each had a sip of whisky. His recourse to the liquor seemed to give him words for what he wished to say.

"It's a paradox, Mr. Connatt, and I am by no means so fond of paradoxes as was my friend, the late Gilbert Chesterton; but, while Byron most certainly wrote *Ruthven*, he wrote it on paper that was watermarked less than ten years ago."

4. *Into the Country*

THE judge would not enlarge upon his perplexing statement, but he would and did play the most genial host I had ever known since the extravagant days of Hollywood. We had a number of drinks, and he complimented me on my steadiness of hand and head. When we parted I slept well in my little room that already seemed more cheerful.

Before noon the following day I returned to Varduk's hotel. Only Davidson was there, and he was far more crisp and to the point than he had been when his chief was present. I accepted the salary figure already set down on my contract form, signed my name, received a copy of the play and left.

After my frugal lunch—I was still living on the money Jake Switz had lent me—I walked to the library and searched out a copy of *Contemporary Americans*. Varduk's name I did not find, and wondered at that until the thought occurred that he, a descendant of Byron, was undoubtedly a British subject. Before giving up the volume I turned to the P's. This time my search bore fruit:

PURSUIVANT, Keith Hilary; b. 1891, Richmond, Va., only son of Hilary Pursuivant (b. 1840, Pursuivant Landing, Ky.; Col. and Maj.-Gen., Va. Volunteer Infantry, 1861-65; attorney and journalist; d. 1898) and Anne Elizabeth (Keith) Pursuivant (b. 1864, Edinburgh; d. 1891).

Educ. Richmond pub. sch., Lawrenceville and Yale. A. B., male, 1908. Phi Beta Kappa, Skulls and Bones, football, forensics. LL. B., Columbia, 1911. Ph. D., Oxford, 1922. Admitted to Virginia bar, 1912. Elected 1914, Judge district court, Richmond. Resigned, 1917, to enter army. Major, Intelligence Div., U. S. A., 1917-19. D. S. C., Cong. Medal of Honor, *Legion d'Honneur* (Fr.). Ret. legal practice, 1919.

Author: *The Unknown That Terrifies, Cannibalism in America, Vampyricon, An Indictment of Logic*, etc.

Clubs: Lambs, Inkhorn, Gastronomics, Saber.

Hobbies: Food, antiquaries, demonology, fencing.

Protestant. Independent. Unmarried.

Address: Low Haven, RFD No. 1, Bucklin, W. Va.

Thus the clean-picked skeleton of a life history; yet it was no hard task to restore

some of its tissues, even coax it to life. Son of a Southern aristocrat who was a soldier while young and a lawyer and writer when mature, orphaned of his Scotch mother in the first year of his existence—had she died in giving him life? —Keith Pursuivant was born, it seemed, to distinction. To graduate from Yale in 1908 he must have been one of the youngest men in his class, if not the youngest; yet, at seventeen, he was an honor student, an athlete, member of an exclusive senior society and an orator. After that, law school, practise and election to the bench of his native community at the unheard-of age of twenty-three.

Then the World War, that sunderer of career-chains and remolder of men. The elder Pursuivant had been a colonel at twenty-one, a major-general before twenty-five; Keith, his son, deserting his brilliant legal career, was a major at twenty-six, but in the corps of brain-soldiers that matched wits with an empire. That he came off well in the contest was witnessed by his decorations, earnest of valor and resource.

"Ret. legal practise, 1919." So he did not remain in his early profession, even though it promised so well. What then? Turn back for the answer. "Ph. D., Oxford, 1922." His new love was scholarship. He became an author and philosopher. His interests included the trencher —I had seen him eat and drink with hearty pleasure—the study hall, the steel blade.

What else? "Protestant"—religion was his, but not narrowly so, or he would have been specific about a single sect. "Independent"—his political adventures had not bound him to any party. "Unmarried"—he had lived too busily for love? Or had he known it, and lost? I, too, was unmarried, and I was well past thirty. "Address: Low Haven" — a country home, apparently pretentious enough to bear a name like a manor house. Probably comfortable, withdrawn, full of sturdy furniture and good books, with a well-stocked pantry and cellar.

I felt that I had learned something about the man, and I was desirous of learning more.

On the evening mail I received an envelope addressed in Jake Switz's jagged handwriting. Inside were half a dozen five-dollar bills and a railway ticket, on the back of which was scribbled in pencil: "Take the 9 a. m. train at Grand Central. I'll meet you at the Dillard Falls Junction with a car. J. Switz."

I blessed the friendly heart of Sigrid's little serf, and went home to pack. The room clerk seemed surprized and relieved when I checked out in the morning, paying him in full. I reached the station early and got on the train, securing a good seat in the smoking-car. Many were boarding the car, but none looked at me, not even the big fellow who seated himself into position at my side. Six years before I had been mobbed as I stepped off the Twentieth Century Limited in this very station—a hundred women had rent away my coat and shirt in rags for souvenirs——

"Would you let me have a match, Mr. Connatt?" asked a voice I had heard before. My companion's pale blue eyes were turned upon me, and he was tucking a trusty-looking pipe beneath his blond mustache.

"Judge Pursuivant!" I cried, with a pleasure I did not try to disguise. "You here—it's like one of those Grand Hotel plays."

"Not so much coincidence as that," he smiled, taking the match I had found. "You see, I am still intrigued by the paradox we discussed the other night; I mean, the riddle of how and when *Ruthven* was set down. It so happens that an old

friend of mine has a cabin near the Lake Jozgid Theater, and I need a vacation." He drew a cloud of comforting smoke. "Judiciously I accepted his invitation to stay there. You and I shall be neighbors."

"Good ones, I hope," was my warm rejoinder, as I lighted a cigarette from the match he still held.

By the time our train clanked out of the subterranean caverns of Grand Central Station, we were deep in pleasant talk. At my earnest plea, the judge discussed Lord Byron.

"A point in favor of the genuineness of the document," he began, "is that Byron was exactly the sort of man who would conceive and write a play like *Ruthven*."

"With the semi-vampire plot?" I asked. "I always thought that England of his time had just about forgotten about vampires."

"Yes, but Byron fetched them back into the national mind. Remember, he traveled in Greece as a young man, and the belief was strong in that part of the world. In a footnote to *The Giaour*—you'll find his footnotes in any standard edition of his works—he discusses vampires."

"Varduk spoke of those who fancied Byron to be the devil," I remembered.

"They may have had more than fancy to father the thought. Not that I do not admire Byron, for his talents and his achievements; but something of a diabolic curse hangs over him. Why," and Pursuivant warmed instantly to the discussion, "his very family history reads like a Gothic novel. His father was 'Mad Jack' Byron, the most sinful man of his generation; his grandfather was Admiral 'Foulweather Jack' Byron, about whose ill luck at sea is more than a suggestion of divine displeasure. The title descended to Byron from his great-uncle, the 'Wicked Lord,' who was a murderer, a libertine, a believer in evil spirits, and perhaps a practising diabolist. The family seat, Newstead Abbey, had been the retreat of medieval monks, and when those monks were driven from it they may have cursed their dispossessors. In any case, it had ghosts and a 'Devil's Wood.' "

"Byron was just the man for that heritage," I observed.

"He certainly was. As a child he carried pistols in his pockets and longed to kill someone. As a youth he chained a bear and a wolf at his door, drank wine from a human skull, and mocked religion by wearing a monk's habit to orgies. His unearthly beauty, his mocking tongue, fitted in with his wickedness and his limp to make him seem an incarnation of the hoofed Satan. As for his sins——" The judge broke off in contemplation of them.

"Nobody knows them all," I reminded.

"Perhaps he repented," mused my companion. "At least he seems to have forgotten his light loves and dark pleasures, turned to good works and the effort to liberate the Greeks from their Turkish oppressors. If he began life like an imp, he finished like a hero. I hope that he was sincere in that change, and not too late."

I expressed the desire to study Byron's life and writings, and Pursuivant opened his suitcase on the spot to lend me Drinkwater's and Maurois' biographies, a copy of the collected poems, and his own work, *A Defense of the Wickedest Poet*.

We ate lunch together in the dining-car, Pursuivant pondering his choice from the menu as once he must have pondered his decision in a case at court. When he made his selection, he devoured it with the same gusto I had observed before. "Food may be a necessity," quoth he between bites, "but the enjoyment of it is a blessing."

"You have other enjoyments," I reminded him. "Study, fencing——"

That brought on a discussion of the sword as weapon and symbol. My own swordsmanship is no better or worse than that of most actors, and Pursuivant was frank in condemning most stage fencers.

"I dislike to see a clumsy lout posturing through the duel scenes of *Cyrano de Bergerac* or *Hamlet*," he growled. "No offense, Mr. Connatt. I confess that you, in your motion-picture interpretation of the rôle of Don Cæsar de Bazan, achieved some very convincing cut-and-thrust. From what I saw, you have an understanding of the sport. Perhaps you and I can have a bout or so between your rehearsals."

I said that I would be honored, and then we had to collect our luggage and change trains. An hour or more passed on the new road before we reached our junction.

JAKE SWITZ was there as he had promised to be, at the wheel of a sturdy repainted car. He greeted us with a triumphant story of his astuteness in helping Elmo Davidson to bargain for the vehicle, broke off to invite Pursuivant to ride with us to his cabin, and then launched into a hymn of praise for Sigrid's early rehearsals of her rôle.

"Nobody in America seems to think she ever made anything but movies," he pointed out. "At home in Sweden, though, she did deep stuff—Ibsen and them guys—and her only a kid then. You wait, Gib, she'll knock from the theater public their eyes out with her class."

The road from the junction was deep-set between hills, and darkly hedged with high trees. "This makes the theater hard to get at," Jake pointed out as he drove. "People will have to make a regular pilgrimage to see Holgar play in *Ruthven*, and they'll like it twice as well because of all the trouble they took."

Pursuivant left us at the head of a little path, with a small structure of logs showing through the trees beyond. We waved good-bye to him, and Jake trod on his starter once more. As we rolled away, he glanced sidewise at me. His crossed eyes behind their thick lenses had grown suddenly serious.

"Only one night Sigrid and I been here, Gib," he said, somewhat darkly, "and I don't like it."

"Don't tell me you're haunted," I rallied him, laughing. "That's good press-agentry for a horror play, but I'm one of the actors. I won't be buying tickets."

He did not laugh in return.

"I won't say haunted, Gib. That means ordinary ghosts, and whatever is here at the theater is worse than ghosts. Listen what happened."

5. *Jake's Story*

SIGRID, with Jake in attendance as usual, had left New York on the morning after Varduk's reading of *Ruthven*. They had driven in the car Jake had helped Davidson to buy, and thus they avoided the usual throngs of Sigrid's souvenir-demanding public, which would have complicated their departure by train. At Dillard Falls Junction, Varduk himself awaited them, having come up on a night train. Jake took time to mail me a ticket and money, then they drove the long, shadowy way to the theater.

Lake Jozgid, as most rural New Yorkers know, is set rather low among wooded hills and bluffs. The unevenness of the country and the poverty of the soil have discouraged cultivation, so that farms and villages are few. As the party drove, Varduk suggested an advantage in this remoteness, which suggestion Jake later passed on to Judge Pursuivant and me; where a less brilliant or more accessible star might be ignored in such far quarters, Sigrid would find Lake Jozgid to her advantage. The world would beat a path to

her box office, and treasure a glimpse of her the more because that glimpse had been difficult of attainment.

The theater building itself had been a great two-story lodge, made of heavy logs and hand-hewn planks. Some sporting-club, now defunct, had owned it, then abandoned it when fish grew scarce in the lake. Varduk had leased it cheaply, knocked out all partitions on the ground floor, and set up a stage, a lobby and pew-like benches. The upper rooms would serve as lodgings for himself and his associate Davidson, while small out-buildings had been fitted up to accommodate the rest of us.

Around this group of structures clung a thick mass of timber. Sigrid, who had spent her girlhood among Sweden's forests, pointed out that it was mostly virgin and inquired why a lumber company had never cut logs here. Varduk replied that the property had been private for many years, then changed the subject by the welcome suggestion that they have dinner. They had brought a supply of provisions, and Jake, who is something of a cook in addition to his many other professions, prepared a meal. Both Sigrid and Jake ate heartily, but Varduk seemed only to take occasional morsels for politeness' sake.

In the evening, a full moon began to rise across the lake. Sitting together in Varduk's upstairs parlor, the three saw the great soaring disk of pale light, and Sigrid cried out joyfully that she wanted to go out and see better.

"Take a lantern if you go out at night," counseled Varduk over his cigar.

"A lantern?" Sigrid repeated. "But that would spoil the effect of the moonlight."

Her new director blew a smooth ring of smoke and stared into its center, as though a message lay there. Then he turned his brilliant eyes to her. "If you are wise, you will do as I say," he made answer.

Men like Varduk are masterful and used to being obeyed. Sometimes they lose sight of the fact that women like Sigrid are not used to being given arbitrary commands without explanation. She fell silent and a little frigid for half an hour —often I had seen her just as Jake was describing her. Then she rose and excused herself, saying that she was tired from the morning's long drive and would go to bed early. Varduk rose and courteously bowed her to the stairs. Since her sleeping-quarters, a cleverly rebuilt woodshed, were hardly a dozen steps from the rear of the lodge building itself, neither man thought it necessary to accompany her.

Left alone, Varduk and Jake carried on an idle conversation, mostly about publicity plans. Jake, who in the show business had done successfully almost everything but acting, found in his companion a rather penetrating and accurate commentator on this particular aspect of production. Indeed, Varduk debated him into a new attitude—one of restraint and dignity instead of novel and insistent extravagance.

"You're right," Jake announced at length. "I'm going to get the releases that go out in tomorrow's mail. I'll cut out every 'stupendous' and 'colossal' I wrote into them. Good night, Mr. Varduk."

He, too, trotted downstairs and left the main building for his own sleeping-room, which was the loft of an old boat-house. As he turned toward the water, he saw a figure walking slowly and dreamily along its edge—Sigrid, her hands tucked into the pockets of the light belted coat she had donned against possible night chills, her head flung back as though she sought all of the moonlight upon her rapt face.

Although she had wandered out to the

brink of the sandy beach and so stood in the open brightness, clumps of bushes and young trees grew out almost to the lake. One tufty belt of scrub willow extended from the denser timber to a point within a dozen feet of Sigrid. It made a screen of gloom between Jake's viewpoint and the moon's spray of silver. Yet, he could see, light was apparently soaking through its close-set leaves, a streak of soft radiance that was so filtered as to look murky, greenish, like the glow from rotting salmon.

EVEN as Jake noticed this flecky glimmer, it seemed to open up like a fan or a parasol. Instead of a streak, it was a blot. This extended further, lazily but noticeably. Jake scowled. And this moved lakeward, without leaving any of itself at the starting-point.

With its greatening came somewhat of a brightening, which revealed that the phenomenon had some sort of shape—or perhaps the shape was defining itself as it moved. The blot's edges grew unevenly, receding in places to swell in others. Jake saw that these swellings sprouted into pseudopodal extensions (to quote him, they "jellied out"), that stirred as though groping or reaching. And at the top was a squat roundness, like an undeveloped cranium. The lower rays of light became limbs, striking at the ground as though to walk. The thing counterfeited life, motion—and attention. It was moving toward the water, and toward Sigrid.

Jake did not know what it was, and he says that he was suddenly and extremely frightened. Yet he does not seem to have acted like one who is stricken with fear. What he did, and did at once, was to bawl out a warning to Sigrid, then charge at the mystery.

It had stolen into the moonlight, and Jake encountered it there. As he charged, he tried to make out the details; but what little it had had of details in the darkness now went misty, as its glow was conquered in the brighter flood of moonglow. Yet it was there, and moving toward Sigrid. She had turned from looking across the water, and now shrank back with a tremulous cry, stumbling and recovering herself ankle-deep in the shallows.

Jake, meanwhile, had flung himself between her and what was coming out of the thicket. He did not wait or even set himself for conflict, but changed direction to face and spring upon the threatening presence. Though past his first youth, he fancied himself as in fairly tough condition, and more than once he had won such impromptu fist-fights as spring up among the too-temperamental folk of the theater. He attacked as he would against a human adversary, sinking his head between his shoulders and flinging his fists in quick succession.

He got home solidly, against something tangible but sickeningly loose beneath its smooth skin or rind. It was like buffeting a sack half full of meal. Though the substance sank in beneath his knuckles, there was no reeling or retreat. A squashy return slap almost enveloped his face, and his spectacles came away as though by suction. At the same time he felt a cable-like embrace, such as he had imagined a python might exert. He smelled putrescence, was close to being sick, and heard, just behind him, the louder screaming of Sigrid.

The fresh knowledge of her danger and terror made him strong again. One arm was free, and he battered gamely with his fist. He found his mark, twice and maybe three times. Then his sickness became faintness when he realized that his knuckles had become slimy wet.

A new force dragged at him behind. Another enemy . . . then a terrible voice of command, the voice of Varduk:

"Let go at once!"

The grasp and the filthy bulk fell away from Jake. He felt his knees waver like shreds of paper. His eyes, blurred without their thick spectacles, could barely discern, not one, but several lumpy forms drawing back. And near him stood Varduk, his facial phosphorescence outgleaming the rotten light of the creatures, his form drawn up sternly in a posture of command.

"Get out!" cried Varduk again. "By what power do you come for your victim now?"

The uncouth shapes shrank out of sight. Jake could not be sure whether they found shelter behind bushes and trees or not; perhaps they actually faded into invisibility. Sigrid had come close, stepping gingerly in her wet shoes, and stooped to retrieve Jake's fallen glasses.

"We owe you our lives," she said to Varduk. "What were those——"

"Never mind," he cut her off. "They will threaten you no more tonight. Go to your beds, and be more careful in the future."

THIS was the story that Jake told me as we drove the final miles to the Lake Jozgid Theater.

He admitted that it had all been a desperate and indistinct scramble to him, and that explanation he had offered next morning when Varduk laughed and accused him of dreaming.

"But maybe it wasn't a dream," Jake said as he finished. "Even if it was, I don't want any more dreams like it."

In the next installment of this strange novel, a corner of the veil concealing the weird identity of Varduk will be lifted. To avoid missing your copy of WEIRD TALES, we suggest that you reserve your copy at your magazine dealers now.

Slave of the Flames

By ROBERT BLOCH

A weird tale of the great Chicago fire

HE HAD always loved the sight of flame, ever since he was a boy. There had been the haymow in the barn, the cottage where he spent the night while tramping to the city. Fire made him feel strange inside, as if it were burning there. And it was beautiful to see things burn.

They hadn't understood that when they made him leave the farm after the haymow in the barn had burned; Squire Henslow had beaten him and said he was "touched." People never understood—they didn't realize what he was trying to do. Why, making a fire was like—like painting a picture, or playing music; it was making something beautiful.

They didn't understand. That's why he ran away after staying at the cottage. He hit the farmer over the head with a poker while he slept, because he wouldn't have understood, either. Then he had done *it* and hurried off. It looked wonderful in the night. It was beautiful to see things burn. And not only things now—people also.

He had imagined about that all the way to the city. If only the farmer had waked and tried to get out—how would he look?

Would he be all red, like those pictures of Hell in the Bible?

Well, one could find out those things now. Here in the city it would be easier and better. Such tall buildings, so many of them! It was the biggest city he had ever seen—one of the biggest there was, they had said back home.

He walked around for a long time. All day, all night, all the next day. He didn't eat, didn't sleep. He had no place to go. He just walked, and looked at the people and buildings, trying to imagine what it was going to look like.

It would be the biggest thing in the world, what he was going to do. He had to laugh, inside of course, so nobody would suspect. All the carriages going by, and the men hurrying, and just as soon as it was dark the lights in the houses winking so pretty.

Just as soon as it was dark there'd be light enough. . . .

He stopped in front of the stable on the street. It was nearly midnight, and there was nobody around. All over, in all these houses, a million people slept.

He walked around in back. There was a big wooden wall stretching out from the side of the barn. It was dry, thick. It would start things nicely.

His hand had been in his pocket for an hour now, holding the box. He felt that it was almost soaked with sweat, but he took it out. The striking surface was dry enough.

"Everybody was so excited. Why didn't they watch this pretty thing while they could?"

He bent down against the wall and lit a match. One match.

And Chicago burned.

The fire ravaged four city blocks. All that evening of October seventh it raged, and the brigades labored at the hydrant unceasingly. It was a tense situation. The watching crowds gazed silently at the ominous red glare that rose from the razed ruins, but though they felt that curious prescience of warning, they did not conceive the whole truth with all its implications. The firemen did. This blaze was in the nature of a mere hint, a taste of what might befall. This the firemen knew only too well. For Chicago, in that summer of 1871, had felt but little rainfall. All through the year the dry gusty winds from the prairie had swept the city; the hot summer sun had blazed down on frame buildings and wooden sidewalks. Now these sudden flames had taken fifty dwellings and a score of lives in the space of a few hours. It was a grisly example of what might so easily happen. A stray spark, a vagrant breeze, a few minutes time—then there might be no checking of the blasts. The fire department was small, the waterworks inadequate. Chicago was wooden, vulnerable.

But the men had come in time. The watching crowd sighed with relief. Sun rose over smoky ashes.

SOMEWHERE in the crowd he had stood. Men had run past him, throngs pushed and jostled as they strained forward. Of this he knew nothing, for his soul was in his eyes—his eyes that reflected the flames as they gazed at the ghastly glory that streamed in the sky. The Apocalypse in the Bible . . . it was like the pictures in the book . . . this was even better than he had thought it would be.

See how the big building behind the stable caught. Little red tongues were licking at the sides, a monster with many mouths eating its walls and breathing hot sparks. And the people were running out and trying to get away from the monster. There was an old man on the porch, who moved very slowly. And the cunning monster watched him—see, it had coiled its flaming tail to bar his path and now it was swelling up closer to wrap around the old man like a big snake. The man screamed, and the monster roared and hissed as it fed on the wooden boards beneath the old fool's feet. The monster crackled with glee because it was soon going to feed on flesh. It did. Hungry monster!

Greedy, greedy monster! It was creeping toward a second house now—no, it was holding out its arms on both sides to embrace two houses at once. It must keep feeding and growing if it would leap like that; leap swiftly as it now leapt at the other buildings. Then its chuckle would grow louder. It had to eat to grow, and the more it ate the hungrier it got because of its size . . . but that was too mixed up to think about.

No, think about how pretty the monster was. All red and glowing and alive against the black sky; beautiful beast eating ugly frame houses. It had put its fingers on the roof-tops now, and tossed a shower of red-hot roses to the sky. Happy monster!

Oh, now the people came. And the horses pulling the fire-wagons. They were going to fight the monster. Fools! They couldn't stop the feast now. Look—the whole block was burning. Roping off the squares wouldn't help. These foolish men—they were going to try and fight the monster with the little black snakes they dragged in their arms, the little black snakes that spit water instead of venom. Water-snakes.

So much noise! Bells clanging and

men shouting and horses neighing and people wailing. Well—the monster heard it too and drowned it out with loud roars, as it crawled over the second block of houses. It was pulling in its tail after it and winding it around new victims, not people now, but whole buildings. How big and fast it was!

Everybody was so excited. Silly! Why didn't they watch this pretty thing while they could?

The fighting men angered the red monster. Roaring, he toppled over the wall of a building. It fell like a flaming wave, and several of the firemen disappeared. Good! But more kept coming, and there were hundreds of little hissing snakes spitting and poisoning the monster's body. But it was cunning. It knew! Now it had broken up into many parts—divided into a dozen smaller monsters. That was wise. A dozen mouths to eat and grow and curl scarlet lips around windows and doors and drag down roof or chimney in flaming fingers. A dozen roaring monsters to fight back as they crawled over the black house-tops and spat embers and ashes on the heads of those puny fools. A dozen dancers, a dozen writhing roarers . . . pull over more walls on the fighters and feast!

Oh . . . it was going. There were too many men, too many snakes. Three of the monsters died. Another was spluttering and fuming, trapped inside a house while stabbing streams of water pierced its bowels so that it belched black smoke and sang in agony. The firemen closed in. They had the biggest monsters trapped in a street-corner. The monsters crawled inside the buildings but the snakes followed them. Some men carried them in to get at the heart of the monsters, and the silver water stabbed them there. They groaned as they died, and pulled down roofs in their death throes. Sometimes their fingers or their tails still moved after they were dead, but the men were now running everywhere and stabbing these fingers or chopping away the tails with axes. Only one monster left now, far away, and it was bleeding. It turned pinker and pinker as it was drained of its life by the water-poison shot by the snakes. Then it turned rose-color; red rose, pink rose, yellow rose, white rose. It was dead.

It was dead. They were all dead, after their feasting. They lay amidst the bones of the buildings on which they had feasted. Dead—poor monsters!

When he realized this he again became conscious of who and where he was. He looked about and saw that he stood against the ropes along the street, in the middle of a great crowd. Now he was suddenly afraid, and all his beautiful thoughts were slipping away; all the beautiful thoughts about monsters and roses and feasts that had surprized him even when he imagined them. These lovely ideas were all gone, and he was standing in a mob alone with his crime.

It was a crime. It was—Sin! He was a sinner, and afraid. Suppose somebody knew? Perhaps one of these people had seen what he had done. Maybe there were men who had watched him while he looked at the fire and guessed why he had such glowing eyes. What if they were looking for him now? They would come for him and take him away because he had given life to the beautiful red monsters and they were angry. Now that the monsters had died they could not protect him any more, and he didn't have fine thoughts to make him brave. No—he must get away quickly.

He jostled his way out of the throng, elbowed through until he was back on the wooden walk, then hurried off into a side street. He walked fast, and he really wanted to run only people would stare.

They *were* staring. Here — down this alley, now. . . .

Had he been followed? No. . . .

Yes.

A man in a cloak was walking down the alley behind him. He walked faster. Perhaps the man would not see him. But the man was hurrying, too.

Where to hide? The cloaked man was approaching. He broke into a run, down the dark alley red-etched in flames from behind. The cloaked man, he saw, was bearing down upon him. He gasped.

A hand fell on his shoulder. A waxen yellow face smiled into his own, as the stranger's bearded lips curled back.

"Come with me," said the man.

And he propelled him back through the alley, pushed him through a gate, entered a yard.

The cloaked man was not a constable or a policeman. He had smiled. He seemed to know, but he didn't act as others would. And he was being hurried into a darkened house, standing back in the yard.

THEY walked up long stairs until they came to the door of a big room. It opened, and they entered in brilliant candlelight.

There were flaming tapers and torches set on low tables. A sweet smell came from the smoke that curled up out of great urns and pots set on the floor. The room was curtained in velvet, and very barely, though regally, furnished. Only a great divan stood at the opposite end, and through the gray vapor from the urns he saw a man lying upon the couch. He stared as the man sat up.

The occupant of the couch was fat—monstrously so—and his great barrel-body was clothed in a long white robe. He had a peculiar green wreath on his head, and everywhere his flesh was covered with jewels; ear-rings, necklaces, rings, bracelets, medals, ornaments—big rubies that flickered with fire, and yellow flame-opals tinged with smoky hues.

The fat man had a face that was old and awful; his flesh was blue and hung in pulpy folds under his eyes, his cheeks, his chin. His nose was hooked and his curved lips purple and swollen.

He looked like a big blue corpse, like the man they had found drowned in Squire Henslow's creek—all swollen up and bloated. Only his eyes were alive, and they were terrible. They were redder than the rubies and more fiercely flaming. They stared at him, never moving.

The cloaked man dropped his arms and sank to his knees.

"I have found him, Divinity," he murmured.

Fat face bobbed, but the eyes never changed. They kept staring. Then curved purple lips opened, and a voice—a deep, dead, drowned voice that was oh so old—spoke.

"Good. Good, indeed. This is the one. I dreamt that it would be so. You remember Apius, my friend? And his spirit, that shone again in Roger that time at London? The cycle of incarnation has revolved again—this man has the look of Apius and of Roger about him. Mark the vacant eye, the dwarfed body, the ever-moving fingers. 'Tis Apius to the life, and his deed alone proclaims it. The final omen has been secured. We are ready, then, at last!"

"Yes, Divinity." The cloaked man pushed his garment to one side, revealing a white robe similar to the one worn by the fat man on the couch.

The fat man stared, then spoke again. "What is your name?" he purred.

"Folks call me Abe," said the incendiary.

"You shall be called Apius, as is your

right," pronounced the fat man, with a frown of annoyance. Then, in brighter tones, "Did you start the fire?"

Abe stood silent for a moment. Something inside him was clamoring for outlet. Reason — even his twisted reason — told him that he must speak the truth. This was no ordinary man; even city folks didn't live in houses like this or wear such clothes. This man seemed to know about him, seemed to understand in spite of his funny way of talking. He was interested. Nobody had ever understood Abe, and most people laughed at him to hide that they really hated him. Abe knew that; he wanted to tell the truth.

"Yes, I started the fire." The words came easily after that. Before Abe realized it he had told the whole story. And he described for the first time his feeling about flames. He told about the monsters and the fight with the water-snakes, and was reassured by the smile spreading over the puffy countenance of the fat man as he listened carefully. The tale was soon told, and it felt wonderful to be able to show other people that Abe could think up dreams like that out of fire.

"Apius!" exclaimed the man on the couch to the bearded one. "I knew it. He lacks wit, but in his crude way he fumbles to Beauty. And did you mark the tale of the monster—'tis Apius' *Salamander* fancy, and Roger's *Great Dragon!*"

He turned to Abe.

"And now, my friend, I shall tell you why you were brought here; tell you my own story. I think you will understand, and soon I shall furnish proof. Listen, then."

THE tale was told; the gross body quivered earnestly, the age-blue lips writhed, and the red eyes stared. Abe listened.

"In ancient days I ruled a throne. I was a poet—I sought the perfect beauty in life. Being Cæsar, I knew no man-made law in my search for the sublimities that shine in stars. I tasted all delights, those of the flesh and of the spirit. And Beauty eluded me at the last. In drugs and in wine I found a soaring glory, but it was not true Beauty, for it fled and left only ugliness upon awakening. I abandoned such debauchery early in youth. When I became ruler I builded temples of marble and towers of chrysolite and jade so that my eyes might feast upon their loveliness as they stood straight and clear in the sunlight from the green hills. This delighted me, but there were days when the sun shone not, and then the stone was gray and ugly, and I saw that wind and rain and dust had destroyed the perfection of Beauty I sought. And age would crumble these monuments I knew, so that I builded no longer.

"In women I hoped to find that intangible delight of soul that poets dream of. Their bodies are but mortal clay, I found, and the ecstasies of passion wane. I turned to new and curious pleasures, yet they too palled to imperfectness. I read the literature of the ancients, but though some had glimpsed of Beauty from afar, none had imprisoned it fully in their strophes or sentences. I walked with philosophers and priests, sought jewels and perfumes, searched every avenue where my prize might lurk. I found it not. For Beauty lay only in Life, and Life is—*fire.*"

The ancient one paused. There was anguish in his flabby face.

"They called me cruel—they said that Nero was a monster! No one ever understood that I sought only happiness and perfection and the meaning behind all lovely things! Because I burnt those damnable criminals they branded me a beast, a sadist! I dipped them in oil and tallow and placed them upon crosses whilst the flames consumed their worth-

less lives; only because fire is beautiful, and I had thought perhaps that when it fed on flesh its glory would become transcendent.

"I burnt pyres on altars, beacons in a pharos. I loved to watch the flames rise and dance as they sang their song of life eternal and unchanging. I sought the way to capture the true Beauty I found in those ocher, crimson, orange, violet, multicolored depths—sought a way to prison and prolong it. Then Zarog came."

He indicated the bearded man who had worn the cloak.

"Zarog told me of the Rosicrucians—those Orient worshippers of the Eternal Fire that is Life. He told me of Prometheus and Zoroaster, and of the Phenix Fable. He was a priest of the Rosicrucian sect, and I learned his mystery. He told me of bright Melek Taos, the Peacock god of Evil, and imparted to me the secret weddings of Evil and Beauty.

"But I bore you with these esoterics, which you do not comprehend. Suffice that I learned. Zarog told me how a lover of Beauty might dedicate himself for ever to its search; of what Melek Taos might grant if given a sufficient sacrifice of fire.

"For a while I was afraid. Rome was in tumult, and the people hated me because they did not understand. They called me a tyrant, a madman—I, the greatest poet of them all! But Zarog pleaded. I must sacrifice my empire for eternal life. I wavered before this decision.

"I had a slave named Apius, who loved me. He too sought Beauty. And it was he, at last, who showed me the way to strength. He knew what Zarog wanted of me, and one night he crept away and performed the deed. He entered the thieves' quarter of the city and fired the houses. The district burned; the work was attributed to the Nazarenes, or Christians, as they called themselves.

"Apius had set the example to give me courage. I would dedicate myself to eternal Beauty, as Zarog wished; sacrifice with fire to Melek Taos. So—I burned Rome."

The red eyes were glazed with reminiscence, the ancient voice mused onward.

"I watched the towers topple one by one, and with my lyre I sounded the paeans of prayer. Day and night the fire raged, and day was night under the sable smoke. The sky was bleeding and I stared at the terrors of Hecate's Hell. Thus I sacrificed an empire to Melek Taos and the Beauty that is Fire. Fire, the eternal life of flames, was now mine.

"When the time came, a harmless dupe—my double, whom I sent in my stead to civil functions—was forced to kill himself to appease the wrath of my deluded people, who did not understand that I had made myself a god. When he died, Nero died. Zarog and I left."

Compassion entered his voice.

"I left Rome, left my poor, foolish people that lacked the wit to understand a god. They found no truth in Beauty, and they hated me until my name became a twisted legend of evil. Irony! But I, a poet, am content that this was so.

"And I have lived on. Zarog and I had sacrificed, and we could not die. Only the flame of Melek Taos can destroy us now; nor shall it descend while yet we worship.

"You must know that we have wandered far since those lost days. Their history is too lengthy for repetition here, but they have brought many things. In many lands and under various disguises we have quested. It has been necessary from time to time to renew our bond to Melek Taos, and sacrifice again. Paris, Prague, a thousand cities have burned in the night on one vast altar to Beauty and Fire.

"In London, long centuries ago, we kindled a blaze that delighted the eyes of the Bright God. And it was there that I again lacked courage to carry on. A villein called Roger was my servant, as Apius was in Rome. Once again he led the way and kindled the preliminary flame of sacrifice. His deed gave me the strength, so London burned.

"Centuries of Beauty, my friend. Centuries dedicated to the perpetuation of poetry. But now the time for sacrifice drew near again. Zarog and I were beginning to age once more, a sign that our bond with the Bright God needed renewal. We abandoned our journeys, then, and came to this new world. That was a dozen years ago, and since then we have not prospered aright.

"Ten years ago, during the Draft Riots in New York, our mission failed. The fire we lighted did not spread. And age crept close. So we have wandered here, at last. The city is large enough for our purpose. My money has insured us secrecy until the deed is accomplished. And Zarog's pyromancy has shown the time to be ripe.

"We had planned to act soon. Once again my courage failed at the last—but now you, Apius anew, have come as an omen to lead the way. Tomorrow night we shall set the fire; and it will be a fire to delight your soul, a flame of triumph rising to charm the eyes of the Bright God so that he shall again renew his pledge."

Abe listened. The fat oldster drew a great ruby ring from his finger and presented it to him. The monstrous red stone was set in the beak of a silver bird.

"Here," said Nero. "A gift, my servant. The Phenix-seal is yours by right. Take it, and pledge your support."

Abe glanced dubiously at the man. His head was reeling; this was all so confusing. . . .

"It shall be such a fire," purred Nero. His eyes flickered on Abe's, craftily winked as he gloated and coaxed with wicked words.

"Such a fire as you have never dreamed of, it will be. Or, rather, such a fire as you *have* dreamed of. The fire you meant to start tonight. The great fire, when the streets are sheets of flame, and the houses turn to red hells in which little burning devils dance and scream for deliverance. Little burning devils, these stupid people will be, shrieking in their torment—these stupid people that never understood you and your love of Beauty. The Bright God wants such people destroyed; so that then the earth shall be free for you and me and the other poets to whom the secrets of Truth are revealed. And we shall see this wonder, then go away to other lands and worship anew. You will be safe; Zarog, here, is very clever. With aeromancy to control the winds, and divination to aid, we cannot be deterred. And after that, to live for ever—you would like money, women, power, excitement; you long for these things, my friend. You can have them, with moments of scarlet ecstasy as well. Say you will come."

"I—will." Abe placed the ring on his finger.

The Emperor smiled.

"Now I have courage," he asserted. "Zarog, let us prepare that which is to come."

On October the eighth, 1871, one day after the first blaze that had so alarmed citizens everywhere, the catastrophe came. At nine-thirty in the evening, Taylor Street burst into a flood of flame.

And with this, as though the first flaring of the fire were a cosmic signal of disaster, a skirling wind rose. The fire-force faced disaster as the blaze crept onward. Great gusts of sparks swirled across the river, and the South Side and business

district were showered with angry embers. Soon a great glare arose and soared over the city. A red hurricane roared, belching smoke and ashes and cinders from a crimson maw that engulfed the city in relentless wrath.

Balls of fire swept the skies and descended to raven at random. On the ground the flames writhed onward more slowly, but they were thorough. Wood and fabric and flesh were food not to be ignored.

Madness stalked the city. Throngs rioted in a stampede of utter fear; the streets were choked with fleeing figures; drays and vans and carriages trampled the hysterical crowds that swept the streets in utter horror and despair. The roar of the fire drowned out all sound save the screams of the dying and wounded, and the shrieks of insane torture from trapped and burning horses. The gas works exploded with a thunderous detonation that shook the wooden sidewalks along which the flames now flowed in rivulets of doom. The great bell of the Court House fell with a final clang of terror, and its collapse was echoed by the crash of crumbled walls.

A river of melted lead ran from the Federal Building. Frightened pigeons sobbed as they rose against the scarlet skies, then dropped, burning as they flew, like winged comets. Daybreak brought new dread as the flames wheeled and spread again, dividing and subdividing so that they combed each street, each alleyway with fiery teeth. Nightfall again, and new horrors. Thousands fought the blaze in vain fury, while the city roared into red ruin.

ABE saw it all. He and Zarog had crept forth, after those curious prayers in the old dark house which they had made at sunset. Zarog wore his cloak, and under it he carried the tarred, oil-soaked ropes. He had chosen a spot in the meaner quarter of the city; a row of ramshackle houses stood close, and a dark alley entered on a stable front. Here, as darkness fell, Zarog had knelt. Abe lit the match, after the ropes had been placed so very cunningly by Zarog's long white fingers. Abe lit the match. . . .

They ran. The carriage waited around the corner, and they drove back, furiously. Behind them was a faint pinkish flicker in the sky. . . .

The wind came, just as Zarog had said it would. He had explained about the prayers, and the circle he had made on the floor. He and the fat man who called himself Nero had talked a lot.

Perhaps they spoke the truth; perhaps they were crazy. Abe didn't know. He couldn't understand half of what they had said, at any rate. All he knew was that he had been promised the fire. The ring he wore was pretty, but he wasn't Apius. Zarog told him that he had seen him start his fire the night before and knew he was a "reincarnation"; Abe didn't know what this meant, but he disliked being called Apius. Still, they were nice men, and they understood about the flames, and now the fire had started. What a great wind!

Back at the house, it was curious to see the fat man wearing a cloak and a tall hat. He was waiting, and when Zarog spoke to him in a funny language he smiled.

"Come," he said to Abe. "Let us roam abroad. We'll find rare sport tonight."

They had driven down the street together. Abe saw it all. After a while they had to get out and walk because the whole way was choked with people and buggies. They were screaming and shouting, so Abe knew that the fire must be spreading fast. Soon he saw the red skies, and then ashes started falling, and he heard the thunder of the blaze.

They struggled through the streets. People were running out of houses carrying bedding and furniture, loading their goods into vans that could not move for lack of space. Women and children cried, dogs raced everywhere as they howled in animal fear. Men on horseback fled through the throngs, trampling and crushing those who barred their way, and lashing out at them with whips.

Now they were in the heart of the fire, and Abe forgot the people as he watched the red walls about him. Fat Nero and lean Zarog stared and smiled.

"We walk through Hell tonight, I think," said the fat man. "And how else, pray, does one reach Heaven? May Melek Taos heed this offering!"

Abe ignored this. Some more of the old man's ravings about Beauty and living for ever, he guessed. Better to watch the fire—the glowing, living fire. It was a thousand monsters now, a thousand roaring beautiful beasts lashing tails of sparks and beating great red wings.

Crash! A wall fell from the crimson skeleton that was the building ahead.

"Back," Zarog counseled. "Blade or bullet cannot harm us, Cæsar, but beware of flame."

"A poet dies by that he worships," observed the Emperor, "but I have no urge to unduly hasten that demise."

Abe only half heard this nonsense. He stared at the embers over his shoulder as they hustled back along the deserted street. All living here had fled before the onrush of the flames.

They came to the center of the city. Here men rioted in the streets, smashing the windows of the stores, plundering them of food, liquor, precious goods. Pickpockets, thieves, drunkards, held high revel as they pillaged unhindered.

"Fools!" sneered Nero. "If these be men, they deserve to die. Behind them is Beauty, and they grovel in trash."

A detonation shook the streets, and waves of liquid horror pulsed down the thoroughfare. Burning oil lapped about the feet of the drunken roisterers. They screamed and fled, or sank into the seething sea to perish. A hostelry with imposing pillars smoldered into flames, and its great iron columns melted like waxen tapers with the heat.

Molten metal sprayed the heads of the retreating crowd.

Abe and his companions were engulfed in the madness; they fought and trampled with the rest. Mad women cackled in hysterical glee as they tore their garments from white bodies made crimson by reflected flames. Idiotic men cursed and fought and clawed one another in raving delirium. And underfoot great startled rats raced and scurried, padding from their holes beneath the sidewalks.

Abe began to laugh and sing, so that Zarog and Nero had to drag him into the side streets. Night merged into day, but darkness remained as the smoke pall shrouded the city. And the roaring of hungry flames obscured all lesser sounds.

The carriage took them to the cemetery high above the city, and here they stood amidst the grassy graves and peered down into the lake of fire. They stood in peace and watched a purgatory, while he who called himself Nero laughed and played upon a curious stringed instrument.

All alone they were, on a hill beneath a sky of blackness, and the strange fat man played a wild sad tune that had no words—nor needed any to aid the voice of mad despair. The man called Nero sang, too, and his voice was singularly sweet. His language was not one Abe could understand, but it too held despair that was a worship. And the bearded Zarog lifted his eyes to the billowing, burning skies and chanted. They were

alone with the dead that day, and there was curious wine to drink that somehow made the music easier to understand.

Abe lay back and watched the burning city, and he felt a peace he could never express in thought or word. This was the most beautiful thing of all. And if the man who called himself Nero was mad, his madness was right, and just. Didn't they call Abe mad? People—like those awful ones rioting in the streets—never could understand.

Night again. "It will burn through the evening," said Zarog. "Let us return to the house and arrange for our departure."

He drove the carriage back along the quieter, deserted streets. It was dusk on the drive—a dusk of ashen hue, and through a blackly sooted sky flames redder than sunset mounted in the north.

This section of the city was almost deserted, but here in the quiet, untouched sections, strange figures crept abroad. There were little old men scurrying close to the walls with leaves and faggots. A small boy was lighting matches before a house with opened doors which proclaimed it to be deserted. A laughing woman was dancing before a flaming barn as they passed, and startled neighbors swarmed out of an adjacent building, shouting threats and oaths as she ran, cackling shrilly, down the smoke-filled street.

"You see?" purred the man who called himself Nero. He sank back in the carriage seat and gripped Abe's arm. "There are a few of us, after all. Pyromania, the fools call it. Little do they know of the true beauty these folk serve in their hearts —the true beauty of Fire, pure and pulsing with the elixir of Life."

They came to the house in the alleyway, left tethered horses and entered, proceeded to the curtained room. There Zarog lit the candles and the braziers.

Abe and the fat man sat in the taper-light as the bearded one scurried about, placing incongruous objects and garments in open trunks and suitcases.

The fat man sighed and spoke. "It is over, my friend. The three of us shall leave here before morning — the fire will be dead by then. But it was glorious—a dream of rhythm from the cemetery hilltop—and a tribute to Melek Taos."

Abe listened, uncomprehending.

"You shall have your reward now. Remember what I told you; how our sacrifice is rewarded. Zarog and I are not as you see us now—we shall become young men once more, youthful and vigorous for many years to come. Melek Taos shall again grant us youth.

"I have riches hoarded in many places. We shall seek them and live again for pleasure's sake until the cycle comes upon us and we kindle another flaming tribute. You shall come with us, friend. For your unwitting aid you shall have all that you can desire."

Abe smiled, fingering his ring. These words meant nothing. This old man was crazy—crazier than they had said Abe was.

The fat one saw his smile, and frowned. Then a gasp of pain crossed his face. Looking up, he motioned to Zarog.

"Hasten," he said. His voice had become shrill and cracked these last few moments.

"Hasten. I feel the time approaching. I'm numbing a bit; I can feel age running sluggishly in my veins, cooling the blood. Before we go—rear the altar and conjure Melek Taos to grant us the boon of youth again."

Zarog bowed. Abe saw that his beard was indeed graying almost perceptibly each passing moment; noted that he shuffled away as he crossed to the center of the room and began to heap incense on a great open brazier placed there.

The fat man who called himself Nero

turned again to Abe. He wheezed his words painfully.

"You do not yet believe, friend Apius reborn? Then as I promised, here is the proof. Remember what I told you—how Zarog and I long ago dedicated ourselves to eternal life, given by the Bright God in return for the burnt offering we placed before him.

"Now we shall evoke the spirit of Melek Taos once more, and receive youth. For fire is Life; fire gave birth to this earth ages ago, and through fire men have been enabled to live upon it. Always they have worshipped their gods with flame; always they worshipped fire under many names. Moloch, Satan, Ahriman, Melek Taos—the Divine Principle remains the same and shall be served."

Nero turned his head again. "Pour the sacred oils, my friend," he called. "Hasten."

Abe listened. In the dusk he perceived with a start of horror that the bluish tinge of Nero's face had deepened. Great blackened lines now wrinkled the flabby face; it was as though this incredibly old man was slowly putrefying before his eyes.

"Look," croaked the one called Nero. "Here is testament and proof for you. I shall invoke the Fire-God and ask the boon."

Abe saw the old man creep across the floor. Zarog, stooping, cast pungent oil into the brazier; so that it glared up redly and illumined the blackness of the room. The great pot of fire flamed, and heady smoke swirled and filled the air with acrid perfume. Zarog knelt down, tracing lines upon the floor with phosphorescent oils, which he lighted so that a little flaming line formed a pentagon in which the two old men now stood.

The man Nero now produced the curious stringed instrument and held it in trembling hands. Slowly he twanged eery notes that rose above the crackling of brazier-born fires. And Zarog, as though in rhythm to the music, began a measured chanting in an alien tongue.

Abe shifted uneasily. These madmen with their curious ritual unnerved him. The insane story had been bad enough, but now this strangely disturbing ceremony made him feel afraid.

Flames seemed to tower ceilingward. The room became filled with a purple haze through which music and chanting crawled.

And then, as Abe rose and gasped, a Presence formed.

Out of the somber smoke, rising from the brazier on roots of fire, a vast intangible outline was limning.

The music, chanting, figure swelled simultaneously. The fire-shape was blinding in its brilliance, but it slowly resolved into the definite figure of a man, a gigantic Being of Flame who writhed out of the brazier-coals and seemed to peer down at the two ancients in the pentagon.

"Melek Taos," breathed a cracked voice.

Then Abe believed. He knew that somehow the story was all true — this was Nero, and he had made a pact with the Lord of Fire.

Nero was speaking, in a high, quavering voice that came slowly, painfully, from an aging throat. His hideous purpled face was shrunken.

"Quickly, O Lord," he wailed. "You have seen that which we have given you in sacrifice—this mighty city we have kindled that its smoke rise to pleasure you. And now we ask again the boon of renewed youth, in accordance with our pact of old."

Abe listened. Of a flash, a thought struck and stunned him.

His voice rose above the crackling flames.

"But *you* didn't start the fire. *I* did."

Nero and Zarog wheeled. Abe proceeded, unwittingly. He would boast before this god.

"Remember? When we set fire to the stable—I lighted the match, not you or Zarog. It's my fire—not yours. Mine!"

The two ancients stared, horrified realization on their faces. It was true! Nero's lyre fell suddenly silent.

Above them the flaming figure pulsed. It seemed to crouch, and out of the fiery depths an angry purring rose. The god was wrathful. Two great reddish tongues of flame swooped out arm-like.

Abe did not hear the screaming of the stricken men within the burning pentagon. He was watching the great man-flame now, staring as though hypnotized at the pillar of fire which writhed from the brazier and hummed madly.

The idiot's eyes glazed. This was another fire—a beautiful living fire. And *he* had brought it! *He* had burned a city to do this!

A shrill laugh escaped his lips. This Nero and his priest—they were running about in the circle and screaming, and the light fell cruelly upon rotting faces as they lurched about. Then the men were sunken upon all fours, crawling weakly as the fire-arm swooped and descended.

Two great flames seemed to circle the crumbling bodies and lift them high into the air. A single shriek rang out, and then both figures disappeared into the center of the fiery head. The Bright One, Melek Taos, had feasted.

Abe laughed, maddened by the beauty of the mounting red glare—laughed to see what he had wrought. He knew that he should flee the place, for the fire was spreading rapidly; yet he wanted to remain.

Now the figure of fire reached out again. It had seen him—Abe! It was roaring angrily. Abe could not stop it.

Or could he? Nero's lyre still lay upon the floor where it had fallen. The old one had played upon it; perhaps its music would appease the rage of the flames.

Abe crawled toward it, picked up the silver instrument. His fingers strummed, as around him whirled bright butterflies of flame.

But two arms were reaching out. Melek Taos wanted *him!* Abe roared as they descended. The lyre fell; he was lifted in blazing paws that seared with incredible torture. There was a moment of terrific anguish, then engulfment.

SEARCHERS in the ruins of the great Chicago fire of 1871 made many startling discoveries. The freaks of the conflagration had resulted in hideousness. There were many bodies found in the lake, in a condition which can only be described as *cooked*. Evidently some poor unfortunates had been driven into the very water before encroaching flames; here oil-blasts had so heated the lake-shore currents that the dead had been boiled alive.

Fires had also started in isolated sections; single houses had burned in vicinities far from the main path of the holocaust. In one of these dwellings, on the near south side, searchers amidst the debris-filled roof-boards found a curious relic, perhaps the most incongruous object of all the myriads uncovered after the disaster. Its total disassociation with the setting in which it was unearthed caused considerable comment, and the object was finally placed on exhibition in the Art Institute some years later. To this day, the story behind the token is unknown, but visitors are still privileged to stare at the strange instrument discovered in the prosaic ruins of a Chicago house.

It was the battered, tarnished, but unmistakable fragment of an old Roman lyre.

"From what mysterious realm she had drawn the notes of her song, we never knew."

Song of Death

By A. W. CALDER

Over the ether waves rode an alluring and sensuous song that carried death to those who listened to it—a unique weird-scientific story of radio broadcasting

CHARLIE CORLISS was one of the least psychic or superstitious persons I have ever known, but it was on his program that the terrible thing started and spread across the continent like a plague. Perhaps he could have stopped it if he had acted early enough, but it wasn't until the second death that we realized the horrible strength of the menace.

Everybody who listened to radio knew Charlie. He was a trumpeter and he conducted his own orchestra on one of the most popular twice-weekly programs. The real reason why Charlie's trumpet calls on the radio were hushed so suddenly has never been told.

"If you want to hear something magnificent, get into the control room in C studio tonight," he told me on the day

that marked the beginning of the horror.

I remember how enthusiastic he looked that morning as he came down from rehearsal, his crisp hair more curly than ever and his eyes gleaming.

"What's all the excitement about?" I asked him.

"I have a new number that will lift you out of your seat." Then his eyes clouded slightly. "Don't understand her myself, as a matter of fact. Her name is Alwa and she brought a new song for audition that we're letting her sing over the wire tonight. Queer thing about it, I can't seem to remember the words, but the tune buzzes in my head like a mosquito. Don't miss the program!"

Charlie was often enthusiastic, but his bewilderment was something strange. When I found I would have to be around the station that evening, I decided I would look over his "find".

Involved in routing several programs and checking on some new transmitting-equipment, I almost forgot Charlie's date. As a matter of fact, his hour had already started when I remembered his promise of excitement. When I stepped into the control room it was in the split-second pause before station announcement. There are hardly more than three men in our whole broadcasting-station, except the operators on duty, who can get into a control room during a program, but it is there that one hears radio in its perfection. With rendition truer than any home set can achieve, one can still watch the artists through a double plate-glass window.

Charlie introduced his protegée to his radio audience perhaps a shade too profusely, but I recognized that his words were making millions of people throughout the country bend closer to their sets. If they could have watched the girl who stood beside Charlie Corliss, they would have been doubly interested. I have seen a lot of beauty during my days and nights around the radio studios, but I have never seen anything so vibrantly alluring as Alwa. Sensitive, shimmering and yet somehow purposeful, the impact of her personality was so strong that even from the distance of the control room I marveled at her lively beauty.

Then Alwa began to sing. To this day I don't know one of the words of her song. The tune began on a weird minor key. Like a flame in the wind, Alwa swayed with her music. Little choppy words, they were, like a bird calling its young. They enticed me and I leaned closer, deaf to everything else. To deep, soothing notes the tune dropped, and Alwa quieted with them, breathing hush and relaxation. My body eased and my mind smoothed out in peace. Then a little trippling overtone crept into the music. Half hypnotized, I could feel the tugging of its call. Alwa's singing had become soft pleading to the microphone, yearning and yielding.

The song came to an end and Alwa grasped the microphone to steady her trembling body. Deaf to the noisy applause from the studio audience, she turned back to the microphone. Only we in the control room could hear her soft notes as she sang again those beautiful last notes. Then her body crumpled and she dropped to the floor.

"She's fainted!" we all thought.

But Alwa was dead.

THE radio audience wrote us letters that night, praising the new song but complaining over the confusion which followed it. Next day they read in their newspapers that the talented young singer had dropped dead at the end of her performance, due to a heart attack induced by emotional tension, according to the doctor.

We were all satisfied to accept the doc-

tor's verdict at the time. It wasn't until three days later, on Charlie's next broadcast, that we knew something was terribly wrong. Meanwhile music publishers were clamoring for the rights to the new song, but of course that had to wait until we could find Alwa's relatives. Charlie's orchestra had rehearsed from the copies they had made of Alwa's own hand-written manuscript.

"Who was she?" I asked Charlie as soon as I had the chance.

"I don't know anything about her, actually. Her address was only a local hotel. They're going through her things to find out if she had any relatives."

To me, one of the strangest parts of a strange story is that we never discovered anything about Alwa, even whether her queer single name was surname or Christian. From what mysterious realm she had drawn the notes of her song, we never knew, though we were to have a glimpse of the fascination that had drawn her from this world.

Charlie plunged into the rehearsals for his next program. His companions noticed that Alwa's death upset him much more than an accident should, although I learned from one of his musicians that he would not rehearse Alwa's song again. Musicians are as superstitious as actors. Obviously they disliked touching a song so fatal.

I arranged to be in the control room for Charlie's next broadcast. I didn't like the grim lines which had grown around his mouth in three days. Only in a control room can one see and hear a complete program. In modern broadcasting, often the orchestra players cannot hear the soloist. They play at full volume, perhaps even with their backs to the single instrumentalist or singer. He is placed at another microphone and it is the job of the control room operators to regulate the mixing from the two microphones so that the orchestra is greatly subdued. This will help explain something of what followed.

CHARLIE's routine got off to a good start that night. First came the full orchestra in a couple of popular pieces, followed by a team of comedians. Then it was Charlie's turn to do one of his trumpet solos.

I watched the control-room operator twist the knobs which toned down the orchestra and spotted Charlie's trumpet. From the first note we knew something was wrong. His music faltered and wavered. Through the double glass I saw him scowl and screw up his eyes.

Suddenly I heard the first weird notes of Alwa's song. Subdued, the orchestra continued with its soft accompaniment, *but it was playing a different tune than Charlie!* His trumpet was calling—calling those queer little off-key chords with which Alwa had started her tragic solo.

Charlie Corliss was struggling with his trumpet. It swerved closer and closer to the microphone. I could see sweat on his forehead. His lips were glued to the mouthpiece, but he seemed to be fighting to break away. The hands which held the trumpet looked as though they were trying to throw the instrument from them.

I saw most of this through a half-daze. Our control operator was gazing raptly at Charlie. Softly through the loudspeaker poured the muted orchestral accompaniment. Stabbing through it, making horrible disharmonies, blared the trumpet. Now it dropped to those deep, soothing notes which marked the second part of Alwa's fascinating song.

Charlie's struggles with his trumpet were terrible to watch. As though the brass had found life of its own, it pos-

sessed him. Visibly, he was losing in the conflict. We heard the music growing stronger, more confident.

Suddenly the trumpet stopped. Only the subdued orchestra music was heard. Impatiently the operator stepped to his controls to build up their volume. Amazed, I saw Charlie still had his trumpet to his lips. Though no sound came from it, he was still fighting his instrument.

Waving to his violin player, Charlie stumbled from the microphone and through the door to the dressing-room. Later I heard that his tongue was jammed so firmly in the mouthpiece that he had to get the doctor's help. Meanwhile, the violinist took over the orchestra.

Puzzled and worried over the inexplicable events, I watched the program continue. Another accident and this hour would be yanked off the air. Nor was the other accident long delayed.

The orchestra continued its routine. I was satisfied to see that the substitute leader was watching the clock and getting the program on the second. The sponsor's message was put over, then the station announcement, followed by the comedians again. The orchestra snapped into its third number. Plainly the musicians showed their worry, but they kept on with the show. That is a bravado boasted by the profession.

It did not surprize me, when the time came for Charlie's scheduled second solo, to see the violinist move to the other microphone. He was a good baritone. He planned to sing Charlie's number. It was a special swing arrangement, with some trick effects for a trumpet, but the voice of the violinist would carry it through. He saw a big chance to show his ability and he leaped at the opportunity.

Again the control operator reached for his dials to tune the orchestra down to a mere accompaniment. The voice came in confident and strong.

After half a dozen bars of powerful singing, the voice suddenly wavered. Hesitantly it tried again, weakened and lost time with the music. To my horror, I heard the minor notes of that fatal song again. In the background, the orchestra continued steadily with the swing arrangement. Almost drowning out that misplaced accompaniment roared the violinist, gaining strength as he voiced those incredible, quick-vanishing words. I saw him sway to the music, his eyes half closed as though he watched the microphone in a dream. To the slower, soothing notes he dropped as I gazed spellbound.

"My God, he's got it, too!" breathed the operator, fumbling forward to bring up the orchestra.

But he didn't cut out the singer quickly enough. As the voice was tuned down, I heard those pleading, yielding harmonies of the song's end. I saw the soloist lean to the microphone as though he were beseeching it. Abruptly, he toppled to the floor.

"That's the end of this orchestra on the air!" I said bitterly, shaking the fog from my brain.

"It's the end of the studio," added the operator. "You'll never get musicians in here again. Not me! It's haunted!"

I RUSHED around to the dressing-room. The doctor stood over the violinist, stethoscope still in his ears. He looked at me sourly.

"Yes, he's dead," the doctor grunted. "Dead from heart-failure, I suppose, for the certificate. Yet he had a mighty strong heart, I know for a fact. Something queer about this. I'd like an autopsy."

Charlie Corliss came into the room. His lips were puffed from his trumpet, his hands shaking.

"Oh no!" he cried when he saw the body of his violinist. "Not another one!"

Turning to me savagely, he demanded, "Why did you let him do it?"

"Do it? I could hardly prevent him dying, could I?"

"You could keep him from a solo! What happened?"

"He started singing with the orchestra, switched off to that mad song of Alwa's, then crumpled up."

"Yes, yes, I know," Charlie nodded his head wearily. "It almost got me out there."

"But what happened, Charlie? Are we all going crazy? Why did you play that tune?"

Charlie looked at me gravely. "Because I couldn't help myself," he answered quietly. "That microphone hypnotized my lips and my lungs. It sounds horrible to say it, but there was nothing I wanted more than to play that song. I wanted to wrap myself in its music, to dance with it, to leap out of my skin with it. I mean that literally! I wanted to get out of my body and let my soul blend with that song.

"Most of my mind wanted all that, but part of me struggled. That little atom of consciousness had strength enough to enable me to force my tongue down the mouthpiece of my trumpet so that I couldn't play any more." Nodding to the body, Charlie added, "He didn't have a chance to stop."

I felt the power of all these unbelievable things, but I couldn't admit it then.

"Come down to my office for a few minutes, Charlie," I urged him. "We both need a drink. Perhaps we can talk this through to sense."

"There's some sense in what he's saying," put in the doctor. "It's not in medical books, but every doctor sees a lot of mysterious things that he can't explain with his science."

In my office Charlie accepted a stiff drink of whisky, even lit a cigarette, but his gravity didn't relax. Although I could feel the alcohol warming my stomach, my brain couludn't escape that clammy touch of fear.

"What's it all about, Charlie?" I prompted him. I didn't dare voice the panic which trembled inside me.

Charlie didn't answer immediately. Instead, he looked at me—looked through me—soberly collecting his thoughts.

"You've known me six years, George," he said finally. "You know that I don't get up in the air over nothing." His look was almost pleading.

I had to admit that he was usually very level-headed.

"This thing has got me!" he exclaimed. "It's horrible! It's something from outside of life, but it's damnably fascinating. I can't pretend to explain how that music allures and soothes and calls. I couldn't play that tune again without giving myself entirely to its smothering power. You know what that means? It means death to my body. What it would mean to my soul, I don't know, but it promises enchanting things!"

"But what did it all come from?"

"Who can tell? Maybe it's the song that the sirens sang thousands of years ago."

Charlie paused and looked at the burning point of his cigarette. As though summoning courage, he went on:

"You know I am no hand about supernatural things, George. And I don't begin to understand all the technical parts of this radio with which we broadcast so freely. For that matter, I suppose nobody really understands much about it in spite of the knowledge of working-details. The human mind is too finite to cope with the things which go on in the unseen world around us.

"What I am trying to say is this: For

a dozen years now, we have been putting the invisible wings of electricity on our music and shooting it into the unknown. Who can begin to guess where it goes? Remember there have always been folk-tales about certain people who could call up outside spirits by singing or playing music? If we have been shooting our music out broadcast, with hundreds of thousands of kilowatts energy behind it, why shouldn't it impinge on that other world? Your radio waves go through stone walls and around the earth. Perhaps they leap that other dimension which separates the seen from the unseen."

"You mean radio is summoning up evil spirits?"

"No, not that. Perhaps what you call a spirit is nothing but music. I have often felt that music itself was a living thing. It's been called living by writers throughout history. In some other world, music may be as normal a form of life as animals in the world we know."

"But music is nothing but sound!"

"Yes, and sound is vibrations. And you, George, are nothing but a harmonious group of vibrations, if we believe the scientists. In another life, your physical shape may be a chord of music, or a song, endowed with a conscious mind. Believe me, when you think about it, you'll see it is just as logical as your radio, about which we really know nothing. Your body is material, matter made up of infinitesimal atoms of energy. Because that energy is given another shape, can it not still have a soul?"

"But Charlie, what are we going to do? All very well to talk far-fetched metaphysics, but what's to be done about our programs?"

"I wonder if it matters?" Charlie gazed at me dreamily. "When I play that beautiful, inviting song, I think it much better to let it take me from this world to its own fascinating plane."

This would never do. "Do you realize," I shouted at him, "that two people have died in our studio? That your whole program is ruined? That your musicians are thrown out of work? We have to *do* something!"

Charlie shook himself awake.

"I suppose so, George, but you don't recognize the stupendous, hidden forces we have aroused. Remember you have seen only the first signs of its power. I am afraid that your big broadcasting company is going to find itself woefully puny against Alwa's song."

"What shall I do, Charlie?"

"Get everything away from association with that song. My orchestra will be disbanded now, so they won't come near the studios. Make sure that every copy of the music is burned. Watch every broadcast from Studio C. The song didn't bother us in rehearsals, I noticed, nor in groups. Somehow its power must be drawn from the transmitting, and even then it is strong enough to attack only a soloist. Be warned, George, if you would fight!"

NEXT day I began to understand his warning. In the morning no musician would rehearse in the studio which had proved so fatal to two. A week earlier I would have called it superstition, but now I wouldn't argue. During broadcasts, the soloists were so restless before the microphones that every program was ruined.

Worse news came with the evening.

Charlie was in my office, pacing the floor in nervousness, when I came back down from the studios about five o'clock. I was tired with the day's worry, the pleading with musicians and engineers, hour after hour, while over my head was black foreboding.

"Seen the papers?" Charlie flung at me.

I snatched up the evening editions. "Oh, nothing you might notice, George,"

Charlie interrupted. "Just an obscure little musician who dropped dead last night from heart-failure! The thing is, he was listening to his radio and died the same moment as my violinist."

"But Charlie!" I cried. "It can't be——"

"Oh, yes, it is," he answered grimly. "It's Alwa's song, right enough. Even you felt the pull of it in the control room. This other man simply let himself sink completely into that uncanny snare of music."

"No! No! It's impossible!"

"But it happened. For the love of humanity, don't let that song get on the air again! It's mass murder!"

"I won't!" I swore. "Not if I have to blow out the entire electric system."

During the evening the police visited us, in the person of a plainclothes man, bringing his own electrician. I had to conduct them to the studio where the two musicians had died.

The electrician tested all cables and controls for possible fatal short-circuits. "Nothing here," he grunted when he was through.

"Would it be possible for anyone in the control room to electrocute a person touching a microphone?" asked the detective.

"Not a chance!" snorted the electrician.

The detective stepped to the microphone. "Now show me just how they were standing when they died," he asked. To make it more realistic, he hummed a couple of bars of music.

To my horror I saw him suddenly relax. His humming mounted louder, jumped off-key. Those too-familiar minor notes!

"Shut up!" I roared at him. "For the love of heaven, stop singing!"

The detective didn't seem to hear me. The electrician gazed at him in fearful amazement.

Louder soared the singing. Hadn't Charlie said that nothing could happen unless the mike was plugged in? I dashed for the control room.

Yes, the microphone was connected. It was switched on and turned to full volume. The loudspeaker poured out deep, soothing melody, already the second part of the song. My senses slipped as I felt the music hypnotizing me, rocking me into lassitude. Stumbling, I reached for a switch and pulled it.

"Did you touch these switches?" I yelled at the electrician.

"Not a thing!" he answered.

In the studio, the detective straightened. He glared at the microphone, puzzled as though it had stung him.

"What kind of spirits have ye got here?" The shock emphasized the brogue of his native tongue. "The place is haunted!"

"Will you lock and seal it for me?" I asked eagerly.

"It's not in me line of orders," the detective hesitated. He was as much bewildered and shaken as the rest of us. "But the place is unholy. You can't lock the banshee into a room," he apologized.

Too soon I was to learn that he was right.

As I anxiously checked other programs, I saw the courage-shattering panic spreading through the nervous groups of performers. My jumping in and out of their acts increased their tremulous alarm. They peered sideways at the microphones, missed cues, forgot timing and ruined their programs. They shivered when addressed or touched, as though they were cowering from some nebulous horror whose attack might come from any unguarded shadow.

CHARLIE was in my office when I went there for a big drink of whisky during that soul-searing evening. He gazed

at me vacantly as a glass trembled in my hand.

"That stuff won't help." He nodded at the bottle. His eyes were haggard. His cheeks had sunken and his whole face was pinched. The mouth that had been delicately sensitive was now quivering and fighting for control.

"Nothing will help!" I answered, the glass poised in the air. "Charlie, if we live through this unearthly night and don't go raving insane, I am going to take this station off the air even if I have to dynamite it!"

"If we live! No musician can escape long while that seductive song is quivering somewhere in the night! I don't know whether its pulsing call leads to heaven or hell, but it's irresistible. It's stronger, now, than just this station!"

"Charlie," I asked, leaning forward and forgetting the whisky, "Charlie, do you think there is a life in that invisible other world for the soul captured by this siren melody? We can't fight it in this world. If I thought it possible, I would let its fascination draw me from my body to fight it in its own dimension."

"Do you really mean that?" Charlie eagerly questioned. His eyes shone for a moment with his old enthusiasm. "You mean you would give your life to confront this spirit in death? I had thought of it for myself."

"What is left?" I countered. "Doomed by an overhanging terror, life would mean only an endless cringing from this song. Murderer's blood would be on my hands every time I heard of another singer's death."

But the enthusiasm had faded from Charlie's face.

"That will do no good," he muttered. "This siren has sucked more strength with each conquest. Your vitality would add to its own gruesome power."

"Charlie, neither you nor I can live if this song remains."

"I know that. It's not my life, nor your life, that matters. All I want is assurance that my death will also mean the death of Alwa's song. I am ready to die. So are you. But our sacrifice must destroy this monster! When the station signs off, come back and we'll plan our deaths."

Charlie's laugh echoed eerily down the corridor as I opened the door.

The inhuman vampire was hungry for more souls. Our station had only another half-hour's broadcasting before it usually signed off for the night, and I tried to forestall any further accident.

"Only orchestra numbers from now on!" I roared in each studio I visited. "No soloists of any kind! The bigger the orchestra, the better."

In the third studio I reached I was too late to stop one of our popular sopranos. She was already singing to the microphone. Easily she went through her song to the refrain. I jumped into the control room.

With the refrain, the soprano's voice quavered. Piteously, she gazed at the microphone. Over the speaker, I heard those fatal minor notes. Into my blood crept the numbing lassitude.

"It's loose again!" I moaned. Growing strength had carried it beyond the first tragic studio.

With a tremendous straining of will, I lifted one numb hand. The operator stared hypnotically at the singer. Squeezing all my consciousness into one thought, I stretched my hand forward. My fingers touched the switch. I pulled it open.

We were off the air.

"And we stay off!" I yelled to the operator.

Rapidly, I phoned to the main transmitting control and shut down the whole station. Alwa's song had supernaturally grown too powerful for us. I wondered

how soon it would turn to other radio stations.

Hurriedly the musicians packed out of the cursed building, desperate to flee from the unknown peril. Even the operators and mechanics looked fearfully at their dials and left. In a very few minutes I was alone in that big, silent building. Alone, I knew, except for a ghostly song and Charlie.

I turned to my office where Charlie and Death awaited me.

I DON'T know what mad thoughts I had expected of Charlie, but his activity in my office amazed me. He was scribbling notes of music on sheets of manuscript.

"There's Alwa's song." He pointed to a pencil-marked page.

Timidly, my eyes ran over the music. I shut my mind against its involuntary attempt to read the seductive, fatal chords.

Charlie was pencilling other notes, although I could not understand their inspiration. He seemed to be writing music that was drawn from heavy reference books at his elbow. Scientific volumes they were, with tables of harmonics, frequencies and chords.

Like an ancient alchemist, Charlie Corliss pored over the big books and scribbled. Sweat ran from his forehead, his hair was plastered with moisture and his eyes held horror and desperate haste.

"Are you ready?" he asked me.

"Yes," I answered simply.

"I know you can play a violin." Bitterly, he added, "You'll have little trouble carrying the tune!"

I didn't want to die. Although life was only a horror to me since this specter had seized our radio channels, still I didn't want to give up uselessly. I shuddered at the thought of being sucked out into that trackless space, of fading into a soundless echo of a destroying song, for eternity to give terrible energy to a soul-destroying tune. Then I remembered the three who had already died. Thousands of others were ready to sing before microphones. Millions would tune in their radios tomorrow and the next day, unaware of the cloying death ready to drag their souls from their helpless bodies.

"I am ready, Charlie," I said.

"Sure you want to go through with this?"

"If it's the only way, I am ready."

"George, we're in this together. I am clutching at a straw, something I have been working on here. We face something far worse than mere death, for the odds are we shall both be prey to that monstrous siren. Even to try it means risking our souls."

"Better to die fighting! We'll try it."

"Remember it is only a last hope. I have been trying to work out the opposite of each note in that song. Sound is only a vibration, you know. For each vibration, there is an opposite vibration. When the two meet, they cancel each other. I have been figuring out the opposite of each note and chord in Alwa's song. Listen!"

He picked up a violin and played from the manuscript he had prepared. I had never heard such discordant noises in my life. The violin cried shrilly, warningly. Its wail ran up to the limits of hearing, and beyond into higher pitches than the ear can follow. It tolled like a bell and then shrieked terrible disharmonies.

"That's awful!" I shuddered.

"Exactly! It's just as repellent as Alwa's song is enticing. It has the opposite notes and harmonies."

We took our violins up to the studio. I switched on the carrier wave and adjusted a microphone. At this hour there should be no listeners.

"Whenever you're ready, George," Charlie almost whispered. "Good-bye, if this doesn't work."

I took a last look around the studio. It was bare as an operating-room, with only a few empty chairs and the microphone cables on the floor. The air hung heavily, as though foreboding disaster. The double glass window of the vacant control room gleamed at us. For a second I thought of that window shining down on our dead bodies, motionless until someone found us in the morning.

SHRUGGING my shoulders resignedly, I turned to the manuscript of Alwa's song. Death had come painlessly to the other three. Where were their souls?

My arm went back. My bow drew out those first minor notes. Suddenly I was in another world. All control went from my fingers. They played with no guidance from me. Something else had stepped in between my brain and my hands, half blinding me. It used my muscles, my violin. I yearned to the enfolding, enticing darkness. I wanted to drift like a thistledown on the beautiful music. Some tiny part of my brain pounded alarm, but that was far away in another life. I floated on a soft cloud of lovely dreams.

Half consciously, I saw Charlie raise his violin. More fascinating it was to watch my own hand and listen.

Suddenly my music stopped. *My trance-like playing continued, but no sound came from my violin!* I could feel the wood under my chin tremble to the strings, but it was voiceless! Charlie was playing furiously, his eyes glued to his scribbled manuscript. My bow sawed back and forth over the strings, my fingers slid on the neck of the instrument, but I could hear nothing.

I was not deaf, for twice the violin lifted its pleading voice. Like stabs of lightning from black clouds, sudden notes broke out in flashes that instantly disappeared.

Then the power left my hands. I stopped playing. My mind reeled from the clash of superhuman elements.

"It worked!" Charlie gasped at me. He rubbed the sweat of his face against his arm.

"Quick, again!" he commanded.

This time I had to watch my music. The power seized my hands again, but not so powerfully. It begged my will to float away on the melody, but I could still think sluggishly as I played.

As before, I saw Charlie lift his bow, and all music ceased. Like a moving picture when the sound has gone wrong, we played furiously but in complete silence. Only in those two breaks where Charlie had failed to synchronize was there a sound in the studio.

Abruptly the end came. Near the last of the song, when I should have heard the pleading, yearning notes, the ghostly hands dropped from mine. So sudden was the release that my fingers fumbled with the strings. I missed several notes. Around my head crashed the discordances of Charlie's composition.

"Charlie!" I cried. "It's gone! I'm free!"

I turned to look at the manuscript of Alwa's song.

"Don't!" Charlie shouted. Jumping at me, he grabbed the paper. He struck a match and lit the manuscript.

"Did we kill it?" I asked anxiously, watching the paper curl and blacken.

"You can't kill an immortal spirit," he replied, "but we have driven it back to its own world."

Tapping his own manuscript of triumphant disharmonies, he warned:

"This will be mankind's armor against any future attack. Guard it well!"

To you millions of listeners who have missed Charlie's once-famous radio broadcasts, that is the reason he has never played for you again.

Thunder in the Dawn

By HENRY KUTTNER

A story to stir the pulses—a tale of warlock and wizard and valiant men of might in the far-off olden time—a gripping tale of Elak of Atlantis

The Story Thus Far

"THE Northmen have invaded Cyrena. King Orander, your brother, is a captive of Elf the warlock, who has made a pact with the Viking chief, Guthrum. We need your help—the armies of Cyrena will follow you, but no other man."

So Dalan, a Druid priest, told Zeulas, who had once been a prince of Cyrena, but who was now known as Elak, a wandering adventurer of Atlantis. Together with Lycon, Elak's comrade, and Velia, the young bride of Duke Granicor, of Poseidonia, they set forth toward the Central Lake, where Dalan's galley waited. Granicor, furious at the loss of his wife, pursued them in another ship, aided by the wizardry of Elf.

Near the shores of mysterious Crenos Isle the galleys met and battled, but were separated by a storm during which Elak was lost overboard. He was cast up on Crenos Isle and captured by the Pikhts, allies of Elf, a decadent, semi-human race who attempted to sacrifice Elak to their god, a Shadow which dwelt in the depths of a subterranean pool. Guided by Dalan's voice, Elak cast himself into the pool and found himself in another world, where only the aid of Solonala, a witch-girl from an alien universe, enabled him to escape temporarily from the Shadow's menace.

Meanwhile Dalan's galley had been beached on Crenos Isle, and the Druid's magic showed him the fate that menaced Elak. Lycon and Velia set out with the crew to invade the stronghold of the Pikhts, while Dalan sought the aid of Mider, ancient god of the Druids. Despite the power of the Shadow and the spells of Elf, Elak was saved by Mider, but only through Solonala's self-sacrifice.

The story continues:

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8. They Come to Cyrena

"ELAK." It was Lycon's voice.

Elak opened his eyes. Gray light bathed him.

He was in the corridor of the pool, in the underground Pikht temple. Above him hovered the small fat figure of Lycon, round face alight with anxiety.

"Are you alive, Elak? Did those damned dwarfs——"

Elak drew a deep breath, got painfully to his feet, water cascading from his hair and garments. He looked down to where, beside him, the surface of the sunken basin lay blue and calm, untroubled by the Shadow that had once darkened it.

"I've just dragged you from there," Lycon said, following his gaze. "You shot up from the water like a cork."

"There was no other?" Elak asked. "You saw no one else, in the pool?"

Lycon was silent for a time, watching his friend's eyes. Presently he shook his head.

"No," he said softly. "There was no other."

And then there was no more talk for a while, because Velia led in the blood-smeared oarsmen, who had just slain the last of the Pikhts; and Lycon was noisy about the number of dwarfs he had cut down, and was, he said, almost thirsty enough to drink water.

"But not quite," he added. "Let's get back to the galley. It wasn't damaged much by the storm, Elak, and we can launch it in two days. . . ."

SO AGAIN the black galley drove northward through the Inland Sea, skirting the western shores of Crenos Isle, on through the swirling waters until white cliffs loomed on the horizon. And there, when it was least expected, Duke Granicor's ship came down on them as the galley was beached.

"Mider rot him!" the Druid growled, climbing ponderously over the rail, his brown, sea-stained garment flapping in the wind. "There's no time to fight him now, Elak. We've got to get the chiefs together, lead them against the Northmen."

"My brother," Elak said. "Don't forget him."

"I know. But that must come later. You can't help Orander till the Vikings are driven from Elf's fortress, where they have their headquarters, and where your brother's a prisoner."

Lycon swaggered up, a flagon swinging against his side. "By the Nine Hells and a dozen more," he observed, "are we afraid of Granicor? Go on ahead, Elak, and take Dalan with you. Give me two oarsmen and I'll stay here and——"

"You're drunk," Elak said without rancor. "Go away." He turned to stare at the long galley that was rapidly growing larger as it swept shoreward. Elak's spirits had been dampened since his adventure with the Pikhts, and the image of Solonala could not be dimmed even by Velia's caresses. Her self-sacrifice had shaken him more than he knew. And within him had crystallized a burning desire to cross blades with Elf, to slay the warlock minstrel—and swiftly!

So he agreed with Dalan. "We'll head inland, eh?"

"To Sharn Forest. The chiefs will gather there, with their men. I've sent a messenger, and the word will go through Cyrena. When the armies have gathered at Sharn, we'll move north on Elf's fortress."

"Good! I wish I had my rapier, though—this sword's too heavy." Elak made the tempered blade hiss through the air, and Dalan chuckled.

"You can spill blood with it, though. Come. Granicor is almost within bowshot."

Dalan in the lead, the band set out to climb the white cliffs, reaching the summit as the Duke of Poseidonia beached his galley. Granicor wasted no time in threats; grimly silent, he led his crew in pursuit.

But the duke was soon left behind. This was familiar country to Dalan, and swiftly the party marched through a tangled forest wilderness, even Velia touched by eagerness that enabled her to keep pace easily. That night they camped in a little valley by a stream that chuckled pleasantly as it wound among furze and bracken.

Elak, sitting by the fire, idly plaited Velia's bronze hair. "It's good to be in Cyrena again," he told her. "I never thought I'd walk this land again. Do you like it, Velia?"

She nodded, the firelight bronze on her face. "It's rough and wild and—and honest, somehow. Strong men must live here, Elak."

"The Northmen are stronger," Dalan

growled. "At least, until Cyrena has a leader." He reached out a huge hand and retrieved Lycon, who was reeling dangerously close to the fire. "Bah, this drunken dog! But he's a faithful one, at least."

"Only the gods know my true worth," Lycon said surprizingly, and collapsed in an inert heap, muttering faintly. Suddenly he sat up, his eyes bright. "Listen, Elak!"

As he spoke feet came trampling through the underbrush. Granicor's voice bellowed a raucous command. Yelling men charged down the slope.

"Gods!" Elak snapped. "He's trailed us, somehow. To arms!" His sharp cry cut icily through the night; swords gleamed redly; and the next moment Granicor and his crew were within the circle of firelight.

Dulled by the heat of the flames, not expecting attack, yet Dalan's men met the charge bravely. The two forces came together, crashed and mingled, and then it was a whirling firelit madness of blood and steel. Granicor headed directly for Elak, and, nothing loath, the tall adventurer sprang to meet him, sword hissing. The blades shrieked together in midair, were sent flying by the power of the blows, and, weaponless, Elak and Granicor closed, the duke snarling oaths, the other watchful and silent. They went down, scattering embers from the fire's edge.

SUDDENLY a shrill, warning cry came, above a low thunder of hoofs that boomed out from near by.

"Vikings! 'Ware — *Vikings!* The Northmen!"

And down into the valley rode red-bearded giants, roaring, spears driving, swords hewing, driving resistlessly over the campfire as they had swept down on Cyrena. Men screamed and died beneath trampling hoofs, and those who lived fled into the forest. In a moment the encampment was empty, save for the Northmen, the dead, and two men who lay locked in furious struggle on the ground.

Elak's arm was locked about Granicor's throat, but the duke's bull-thewed legs were slowly crushing his ribs, forcing the breath from his body, when the Vikings prodded the two apart with ungentle blades.

"Thunder of Thor!" a harsh voice grunted. "What madmen are these? Guthrum, they——"

Guthrum! At that name Elak tore free, sprang to his feet, heedless of the steel points that pricked him. His stare found a red-bearded giant in chain-mail and brimless helmet, a man whose face had once been strong and powerful and valorous—a man whose eyes were dead!

Blue eyes, dull and cold and bitterly ferocious, watched Elak. This was Guthrum, leader of the Northmen, whose pact with Elf had resulted in the imprisonment of Orander, King of Cyrena.

"Guthrum?" It was Granicor's voice. "The Viking? My people aren't at war with yours. I am from Poseidonia!" The duke stood squarely facing Guthrum, looking up defiantly at the somber figure on horseback.

Without replying the Northman lashed out with a mail-shod foot, sent it driving into Granicor's face. Blood spurted as the duke reeled back. He caught himself, fumbled for a weapon that was not there —and hurled himself forward, up at Guthrum's throat, snarling a blazing oath.

The Viking's horse reared; Granicor went down under driving hoofs. Bitter laughter shook Guthrum, but the dull rage in his eyes was unchanged as he looked down on the prostrate Atlantean, turned to eye Elak. The tall adventurer felt a shudder course down his spine as he met that dreadful blue gaze. Some-

thing had been drained from the Viking chief, and there sat in his eyes that which was not human.

Granicor staggered upright, and Guthrum wheeled his mount to face the gory figure. In silence he listened while the duke choked out furious curses born of agonizing rage and shame. And then:

"Do you think I fear such as you? Do you think I fear anything on earth—after what a warlock has shown me?" The dull stare of the Viking was utterly horrible in its cold ferocity. "I, who have come sane from the vaults of Elf's citadel—shall I fear your curses?"

He clapped spurs to his horse, went thundering into the darkness. From the gloom his voice came roaring back:

"Crucify those men!"

9. *The Chiefs in Sharan*

SPURRED by the menace of Guthrum's words, Elak tore free momentarily from his captors, but as he turned to the forest they were upon him. He fought furiously, desperately—uselessly. He was born down, held powerless in the grip of red-bearded, mail-clad giants, as Granicor, his face a bloody ruin, was also held.

Working swiftly, the Vikings stripped Granicor of his armor, dragged him to where a great oak grew near by. He cursed them, striving to break away, his tiny eyes flaming with rage and fear. But thongs lifted the duke's ape-like body, binding him inexorably against the tree's bole. His arms were drawn up behind him, circling the trunk—and with iron spikes and improvised hammers the Northmen went about their crimson work.

Elak watched, white-faced, as iron tore through flesh and bone, listening to the frightful cries that burst through Granicor's mangled lips. The Vikings left him at last, letting him hang by his hands, shoulders wrenched almost out of their sockets. They turned to Elak.

He tensed for a hopeless struggle. And abruptly he sensed astonishment in the craggy faces about him. The Vikings had turned, staring, to where a gross brown figure stood just within the circle of firelight.

Dalan—his toad face hideous with fury, huge hands lifted. He made no sound, but so dreadful was the menace in his expression that the Northmen were held motionless for a moment. Then a cry went up; they surged forward, blades ready.

The Druid flung out his arms in a strange gesture—as though he hurled a curse at his enemies. From his thick lips a word came, unfamiliar, alien. There was power in the gesture, power in the word Dalan spoke. The air seemed to quiver, charged with electric force.

Thunder burst in Elak's ears. He was flung back, blinded by a sheet of white flame that washed the clearing in stark brilliance. For a second he lost consciousness.

Then the Druid was lifting him, muttering curses. Feebly Elak freed himself, stared around. The place looked as though lightning had struck it. The grass and trees were seared and blackened, and of the Northmen only charred corpses in half-melted armor remained.

"Ishtar!" Elak whispered, his voice unsteady. "What—what happened, Dalan? Is this more of your—magic?"

The Druid nodded. "A fire-magic I cannot work often. We have power over flame, Elak—and there's flame in the sky as well as on earth. With Mider's aid, I drew down the lightning. Those barbarians died by their own god's thunderbolt." Vicious laughter shook the huge bulk. "Lucky for you I wasn't cut down when the Vikings rode in. Look, their

horses have stampeded—those that aren't blasted to death."

Elak touched his singed eyebrows. "I don't see how I escaped. Can you direct this wizard lightning of yours, Dalan?"

"Perhaps. Also the Northmen wore armor, and you have none. That may have accounted for it. See—the man they crucified, Granicor—he wears no armor, and he's still alive. Barely, I think."

Elak's gaze went to where the tortured body of the duke hung from the oak. He hesitated, then went forward purposefully.

"Lycon?" he asked over his shoulder. "Velia? Are they safe?"

The Druid nodded. "Yes, they're waiting not far away. But the rest of the crew are dead or scattered. We'll have to move quickly to reach Sharn Forest—I didn't know the Vikings had come this far south, and four of us can't very well fight an army. In Sharn we'll meet the chiefs—what are you doing, you fool? Freeing that dog?"

"He's an Atlantean, at least," Elak said, wrenching at one of the iron spikes that transfixed Granicor's hand. "And this is no way for any man to die."

The duke had apparently lost consciousness. As the last spike came free, his body slumped down in a bloody huddle at the tree's foot. Elak paused.

"He can't live long. But I don't like to leave him here to be tortured by the Northmen if they come. Yet——"

"We can't take him with us! Gods, will you feed him pap and nurse him after he's just tried to slit your throat?—while Elf rules Cyrena and holds your brother captive? I tell you we must get to Sharn—and quickly!"

"Very well," Elak agreed, turning toward the forest. "He can't live till morning—no man could, with those wounds. To Sharn, then—and after that we march on Elf's fortress."

"We march on Guthrum's army," Dalan grunted, "wherever it may be. But it won't be far from the warlock's citadel. Guthrum's headquarters is there."

His ungainly figure vanished in the shadows, Elak at his side. And at the foot of a great oak tree a frightful figure dragged itself half erect, an ape-like man, seared and bloodstained and wounded on hands and feet. Mangled lips writhed and opened.

"Elf's—fortress," a harsh voice whispered, cracked with agony. *"And Guthrum!"* A gout of blood spewed from the man's throat, and a paroxysm of coughing shook him. He clung to the oak, dragged himself upright, grinning with abysmal pain.

"So I won't live till morning?" he mumbled. "I'll live—till I find Guthrum!"

Duke Granicor staggered a few steps and collapsed, but he lay inert for only a moment. Then, very slowly, wheezing and groaning between clenched teeth, he began to drag himself into the forest. . . .

ELAK stood before the Druid altar in Sharn Forest, a great gray stone, its top hollowed out into a shallow basin that was stained darkly by countless ages of sacrifice. It was dawn. A day and a night had passed since the encounter with Granicor and the Northmen, and for a few hours Elak had slept in the shadow of the Druid stone, while the chiefs gathered, drawn to Sharn by swift messengers. Lycon and Velia had slept beside him, and Dalan had watched, greeting each newcomer as he arrived. Now nearly all the chiefs were here, a grim half-circle in the cold light of dawn, their strong faces betraying little of their thoughts. Yet somehow Elak sensed hostility in the eyes watching him, and their gaze was suspicious as well as appraising. Dalan

realized something of this, for his ugly face was set in an appalling snarl.

A young chieftain pushed forward, bull-necked, ruddy-cheeked. He advanced till he stood only a few feet from Dalan, and halted with folded arms.

"Have I your leave to speak, Druid?" he asked mockingly.

Somber eyes watched him. "Ay, Halmer. Since Cyrena chooses a cub for spokesman—speak."

Halmer's laugh was scornful. "My words are those of all, I think. Well—listen, then. The Northmen are still on the coasts. They will not come south. If they do, we can drive them back."

"What of Orander?" Dalan asked. "What of your king?"

The young chief hesitated. Then, gathering courage from the Druid's calm, he snapped, "We'll fight for our own holdings, if need be. But Elf's magic—who can fight that? I say, let the Northmen hold the coast, if they want it. They've not troubled my lands yet. If they do, I'll know how to drive them away."

"And one by one you will go down beneath Guthrum," Dalan said. "Halmer speaks for you all? You'll let your king rot in Elf's power, you'll let the Northmen hang like a cankerous sore on the coast—by Mider! but you need a king's strong hand to rule you! Without Orander you squabble among yourselves like a pack of snarling curs."

Some looked shamefaced at that, but none spoke.

Finally:

"Who is this Elak?" one asked. "You say he's Zeulas, the king's brother. Perhaps. But you ask us to bow down before a man who killed his stepfather—a man who may, then, kill his brother and rule Cyrena!"

Elak growled a curse. He pushed past the Druid.

"It wouldn't take much of a man to rule you, I think," he snapped harshly. "There were not so many fools and cowards here when I left Cyrena. I killed Norian, yes—but in fair fight, and most of you remember that my stepfather had no great love for either Orander or me. But as for my wanting to rule this land of women—bah! I've asked your aid. If you won't give it, I'll go to Elf's fortress alone and find my brother."

At his words there was a stir. One man, a tall, lean oldster in dented armor, came to cast his sword at Elak's feet.

"Well, I'll go with you, at least," he said. "And my followers are not few. I remember you in the old days, Zeulas—and I know you speak true words now."

With antique courtesy Elak gravely retrieved the fallen sword, touched his forehead with the hilt, and returned it to the oldster.

"Thanks, Hira. I remember you, too, and that you were always ready to fight for Cyrena. These other dogs——"

Hira's lean face twisted wryly. "No, Zeulas—or Elak. They are not dogs; they're brave men all—but fear of Elf's magic and hatred of each other have made them less noble."

Brawny Halmer laughed, "Go with Hira, stranger—and you too, Druid, since he's a madman too. I go back to my own holding now—and send me no more messengers." He turned on his heel, to be halted by the curt voice of Dalan.

"Wait."

He turned. "Well?"

"You fight among yourselves, you follow cubs like Halmer—and you fear Elf's magic. Now for ages on uncountable ages the Druids have dwelt in Cyrena, and they will not go down now before the gods of the North—not for the lack of a few strong sword-arms. So I tell you this: Druid magic may protect you against Elf's wizardries. And it may not. But,

by Mider!"—the toad face was a venomous devil mask; Dalan spat the words at the chiefs—"By Mider! Elf won't protect *you* against the power of the Druids! And we have not lost our power!"

Some shrank back, and there were pale faces among those turned to Dalan. But Halmer laughed scornfully, shrugging broad shoulders.

"Old men and children may fear you," he mocked. "But I do not."

The Druid lifted a huge hand, pointed upward. His voice came sonorously, laden with menace.

"Then listen, Halmer. And—watch! Should it not be dawn now?"

At his words a little movement of apprehension shook the chiefs. None had noticed before, but over the brightening vault of the sky an iron-gray cope of cloud had been drawn. Heavily it lay above Sharn, growing darker as they watched. A shadow fell on the clearing. The trees loomed strangely ominous in the dimness.

Yet Halmer laughed again. "Do we fear clouds? Your magic is feeble—charlatan!"

DALAN said nothing; his black eyes, half hidden by sagging lids, watched Halmer. A cold wind blew through Sharn; whispers rustled the forest. Steadily it grew darker.

From the chiefs a low murmur of fear went up.

Elak felt Velia creep close to him, put his arm protectingly about her slim waist. For once Lycon was silent, looking up apprehensively. Before the altar Dalan's misshapen figure towered, arms raised in menace.

Halmer's voice was not quite steady, his face a little less ruddy, as he barked, "I'll not stay here longer. I——"

"Go," the Druid said. "If you dare."

Halmer clapped hand to sword, turned, pushed through the group of chiefs. None followed as he moved to the edge of the clearing. Then, about to step into the dark shadows beneath the trees, he paused and drew back a step.

It seemed to Elak that, far in the gloom, something was watching—something infinitely horrible, avid for prey. And Halmer must have sensed something of this. He wavered, without taking step forward or back.

"Druid magic is feeble," Dalan whispered. "What holds you, Halmer? There is nothing in the wood."

Nothing—but a soft soughing, a nameless rustle in primeval, shadow-darkened forest. The dark dawn lowered over Sharn.

"Old men and children fear me," the Druid mocked. "But *you* do not, Halmer. No."

Snarling a furious curse, the young chief leaped forward into the gloom as though casting off unseen shackles. The murmuring deepened, grew to a low, sullen roar. Halmer was a dim shadow plunging forward between towering trunks.

Men saw him pause, casting a startled glance upward. His sword flashed out—and the roar of the forest grew deafening. From above something came hurtling down, a great branch, torn from its parent tree, sent plunging through foliage, upon a man who screamed once in frantic fear and died. Men saw Halmer borne down, broken, under the terrible impact. The roaring died to a faint murmur, lessened almost to nothing.

"Druid magic is feeble," Dalan said softly. "Does Halmer think that now?" He swung to face the chiefs, bellowing. "Follow Halmer if you dare! Leave Sharn without swearing fealty to Elak—and you walk the forests under the Druid curse.

By Mider! Go—and see how long you live!"

But none dared face the Druid's wrath. One by one the Chiefs came forward and cast their blades before Elak.

So Elak took command of Cyrena's armies—and from Sharn Forest the word went forth like flame: Gather! Sharpen steel! The land is risen against the Northmen—and the king's brother leads Cyrena against Elf and Guthrum!

Gather! Gather to march against the Viking hordes!

10. In the Valley of Skulls

LYCON swilled wine from a goatskin, set it down, and wiped his mouth with the back of a pudgy hand. His sharp eyes drifted over serried ranks of armored man, flashing steel, horses snorting hungry for battle. It had taken twelve days to draw the last fighting-man from the mountains and far places of Cyrena; three days more of steady marching to reach the Valley of Skulls, named for a bandit who, long ago, had littered the slopes with the heads of his enemies. But the Northmen had drawn together swiftly, and had made their stand, too, in the Valley of Skulls. A river separated the two armies, safely beyond bowshot of each other.

"When do we attack?" Lycon asked Elak, who stood beside him on a little knoll.

"Soon," the lean adventurer said. "The sun will rise in a few minutes. At sunrise we cross Monra River." He tested the metal of his rapier. "It's good to have a weapon like this again. I'll give this blade its baptism today."

"And I'll give mine," Velia broke in, coming lightly up the hill toward them. Her slim armor-clad body gleamed in the gray light of false dawn. Her bronze hair foamed out from a helmet that was too small to prison its bright masses. "This is different from Poseidonia, Elak. This was the life I was meant for—not a perfumed harem in Granicor's palace."

"Yes, it's different from Poseidonia," Lycon said glumly. "They have good liquor there. It's next to impossible to get wine in this barbarian land, and the bitter ale your countrymen drink is too much for me, Elak. Gall and wormwood!" He spat and reached for the goatskin again.

Elak drew Velia close to him, kissed her swiftly. "We may meet death today," he told the flushed girl. "I'd rather you'd stay in camp."

Velia smiled and shook her head. "I've tasted war, and I like the draft. Listen!"

Far along the valley trumpets blew a call; they grew louder, closer, till the tocsin resounded from slope to slope. Across the river the armies of the Northmen waited. . . .

"They mean to use arrows as we cross," Elak said. "But I think they'll be disappointed. My plans are made."

Trumpets shouted, drums groaned, banners lifted, streaming in the chill dawn wind, and the army of Cyrena moved forward. Brawny, fair-skinned, yellow-haired warriors, following their chiefs, riding their chargers into the foaming current of Monra River—and, watching, Elak smiled.

"Hira and Dalan have led men to the Vikings' flanks," he told Velia. "The Northmen think we'll ford the river near the center of their front. But—look!"

The first rank of Elak's army were in the river, dashing across in the face of a storm of arrows. On the opposite bank waited pikemen, and behind them, armored redbeards with swords and axes. The men of Cyrena seemed suddenly to surge forward in the wake of the advance guard, hurling themselves toward

Monra River, down the valley's slope. But in their rear ranks a concerted movement was taking place; whole troops and companies were racing to left and right, slanting toward the river, attempting to outflank the Northmen.

"What's this?" Velia asked. "The Vikings can ride as fast as our men. Why——"

Across the river the enemy had seen Elak's move, and their flanks moved outward—but not far. A great shout arose far to the left, and, a moment later, a thunderous roar came from the right. Over the ridge, on both wings of the Viking army, rode warriors, streaming down the slopes, swords and lances gleaming in the sunlight.

"Hira—and Dalan!" Lycon said. "They outflanked the Northmen in the night. They'll give us a chance to cross Monra."

Now the strategy was evident; a thin line of warriors held the bank of the river, their bowmen keeping the enemy engaged. And the rear ranks of Cyrena galloped to left and right, racing into Monra River, plunging across it and up the steep shores in the face of a hail of arrows and steel. They could not have succeeded had it not been for Hira and Dalan, whose warriors spread ruin and confusion in the Viking flanks.

"We've crossed," Elak barked, eyes agleam. "Now we're on equal ground—it's strength, not strategy, that counts now we've crossed Monra. Come on!" He turned to a great white charger that stood near by, stamping his impatience, his hoofs striking fire from the rocks underfoot. With one leap Elak was in the saddle.

Upright in the stirrups, shouting, rapier unsheathed, he thundered down the slope, and behind him rode Lycon and Velia—down to the water's edge, into Monra River, foam splashing high as they charged across. A roar went up from the warriors—and the next moment, driven back by the impetus of Elak's forces, slashing and thrusting at his heels, the Northmen gave way up the slope, desperately contending each inch of ground lost.

Then there was nothing but a red maelstrom of hewing and cutting, ax and sword and strongly-driven spear; screaming of horses that galloped by with riders clinging with one hand and warring with the other; horses plunging and dying in a welter of thunderous crimson ruin—giant men fighting and falling and slaying as they fell.

Raven banners toppled. Shouts of *"Odin! Thor with us!"* mingled with roars of *"Cyrena! Cyrena!"* Elak thrust and thrust again, guiding his steed with one hand as it stumbled and leaped over knots of prostrate, struggling men and still, bloody bodies. Above the ranks that surrounded him he saw the Druid's head nodding and swaying far to the right, and a great sword hewed steadily about Dalan, cutting a wide swath of corpses. And ahead, in the front rank of the Viking army, rode Guthrum, red beard flaming, moving like a towering pestilence among men whose helms and heads were crushed by his bloody ax.

"Thor! Thor with us!"

"Cyrena!"

Sweat and blood smeared Elak's face. He tried to find Lycon and Velia, knew it was impossible in the mêlée. A Viking rode at him yelling, spear leveled; the white warhorse leaped forward and aside at Elak's urging. The spear-point grazed his cheek as he swayed aside, and his blade sank deep into the Northman's hairy throat. He whipped it out, steel singing, thrust at a new foe.

THE sun rose higher, and the reek of spilled gore mingled with the stench of sweat. At the top of the ridge the

Vikings rallied, knowing that if they were driven past it they were lost. And like a massacre King Guthrum raged among his enemies, his ax rising and falling steadily, rhythmically, dreadful as the hammer of the Northmen's god Thor. The army of Cyrena was checked—driven back a little down the slope.

"Forward!" Elak spurred his charger, sent it leaping against the mad horde that swept down Skull Valley. *"Cyrena! Ho, Cyrena!"* His rapier darted out like a snake striking, and its touch was as deadly. A Viking fell, screaming his deathcry.

And Elak's voice caught his army as it hesitated on the brink of retreat that led to destruction. One man, mad with valor, facing an army—and then Cyrena held, held and resisted and charged to meet the Northmen as they poured down.

"Slay!" A voice screamed—Dalan's, hoarse, trumpet-loud. "Slay the Vikings! For Cyrena!"

Men dazed and exhausted with battle felt new life pulse within them; blood-drunken, murder-hungry, they flooded against their enemies in a blasting charge that could have only one result. Fighting bitterly, insanely, hopelessly, the Northmen were overwhelmed, pushed up to the crest—beyond it, down the slope, while from the Valley of Skulls the armies of Cyrena came like a consuming flame. It was the day of doom for the Vikings—their Ragnarok, and the raven banners fell in the dust and were trampled by racing hoofs.

"Slay! Slay the Vikings!"

Upright in his stirrups Elak shouted, seeing in the defeat of the Northmen the ruin of Guthrum, the end of Elf—the freeing of his brother Orander. Cyrena had conquered—that he knew. Beside him Lycon reined up, his round face flushed and bleeding.

"Ho, Elak! They run like rabbits!" Even now Lycon could not refrain from his habitual exaggeration. For the red-bearded giants were not fleeing; they fought on, hopelessly, slaying as they died.

Resolution flared in Elak's eyes. "Lycon—stay here. Lead our men." He whirled his horse.

"Where are you going, Elak?"

"To Elf's fortress! Now! I'll take him by surprize——"

The rest was lost as Elak clapped spurs down, galloped up to the ridge—along it, skirting the edge of the battle. Lycon's shout was unheard in the roar.

But another had seen Elak's flight. A horse broke from the uproar, raced in pursuit. Astride it sat Dalan, brown robe streaming. Not even in this battle had he donned armor, and strangely no weapon had touched him. But few could venture alive within the deadly sweep of the Druid's sword. The runes carved on its blade ran red now, dripping along the horse's flank as it raced after Elak.

And behind them rose the death cry of the Vikings in Cyrena, while after Elak, after the Druid, rode vengeance. Guthrum on his huge black charger, grimly silent, leading a little band of Northmen—and there was cold murder in the Viking king's bitter eyes!

11. How Granicor Died

ELF'S fortress rose, a great grim castle of stone, flanked by the sullen waters of the Inland Sea. It was empty now, or nearly so, for the Vikings had gone to meet Elak's army in the Valley of Skulls, and Elf kept few servitors. Men whispered that not all of these were human.

In the dimness of early morning a man had come down from the hills and entered the citadel, hoisting himself painfully from stone to jagged stone of the wall that guarded Elf's privacy. But the rivet-studded, iron barbican that blocked

the inner gate he could not pass; and so he waited, skulking in the shadows, caressing the edge of a long sword he carried in one maimed hand. The face of Duke Granicor was like that of one of the gargoyles that grinned from the roofs of the fortress. Incredibly he had lived, had made his way north in search of Guthrum, and now, knowing nothing of the battle in the Valley of the Skulls, he sat on his haunches, a malignant fire glowing in his eyes. His clothing was in rags, and he more than ever resembled some monstrous shaggy ape lying in wait for its prey.

The sun was high when at last he heard the clatter of hoofs, and swiftly drew back into a shadowy niche. Elak and the Druid reined to a halt before the door of iron let into the outer wall, and the tall adventurer swung from his horse, his gaze examining the rough stones. The other's voice halted him.

"Wait, Elak. We won't have to climb. I'll open this door for you."

Dalan, without dismounting, reached into the folds of his robe, drew forth something which he hurled at the barrier. Immediately a sheet of blinding white flame sprang up, hiding the wall momentarily, setting the horses lunging and prancing in terror. Elak was nearly jerked from his feet as he fought to hold his steed.

Then the flames died. Where the door had been was a white-hot puddle of melted iron, and the stones of the portal were blackened and cracked by the intense heat. The Druid spurred forward his horse, and it hurdled the searing liquid iron easily. Elak followed, just in time to see fire burst out from the grill of the barbican.

"So far so good," Dalan grunted, watching the iron melt and drip to the stones of the courtyard. "But Elf doesn't depend on doors and walls alone."

Elak, looking up, did not answer. On the summit of the inner wall a gargoylish figure was carved seemingly of rugose dark stone, a creature that might have sprung from any of the Nine Hells. Stunted and huge and hideous it seemed to crouch above the courtyard, glaring down menacingly. Wide wings swept out from its gnarled shoulders. Somehow Elak sensed evil in the posture of the thing, the tiny eyes that seemed to watch him.

"Come! The barbican's down——"

THE Druid's black warhorse stepped forward—and simultaneously Elak caught a flicker of movement from above, sensed rather than saw a great figure that hurtled down, wings sweeping, talons clutching murderously. He clapped spurs into the stallion, sent him driving against Dalan's steed. With the same movement he unsheathed his rapier, thrust up almost without aim.

A flapping of wings buffeted him. The weapon was torn from his grasp, and he crashed down on the stones, battling for his life with a monster that clawed and bellowed and ripped with vicious tusks—the thing he had thought carved from stone, the gargoyle, brought to evil life by Elf's dark sorcery. Exhausted as he was, Elak was no match for the creature. The fangs drove toward his throat; a foul breath was strong in his nostrils.

Then the weight on Elak's body was gone; gasping for breath, he saw the monster gripped by the Druid, lifted above the bald, gleaming head. There was tremendous strength in Dalan's gross frame. He crashed the struggling monster down on the flags, leaped on it with crushing feet. His sword swung redly. . . .

"By Bel!" Elak murmured, retrieving his rapier. "Is that a devil? I've never

seen beast or man like that before, Dalan."

"Nor has anyone else," the Druid informed him, staring down at the monster's still body. "It's an elemental, and devil's a good name for it. Elf set it to guard the gate. Well"—he swung his blade—"if I can cut through the warlock's neck as easily—good! Leave your horse, Elak. We must go on foot from here."

Hidden in a niche near by, Duke Granicor watched, wondering. But when Dalan and Elak passed the threshold, vanishing from sight in the depths of the fortress, Granicor sprang out and followed them.

And down from the hills rode a half-dozen horsemen, led by King Guthrum, spurring and yelling as they galloped. Only the Viking chief was silent, gripping his war-ax on which the blood had dried in dark red splashes. . . .

"To the vaults," Dalan said, hurrying swiftly along empty stone corridors. "I know the way. I've seen it often in my crystal. Hurry!" The Druid almost seemed to sense the danger that followed at their heels.

Elak's quick gaze searched the depths of side passages that led into enigmatic depths of the fortress. They raced on, through high-vaulted tunnels, down winding stairs dimly lit or in darkness, across great rooms that housed the magnificence of a king's palace.

They met no one. The vast citadel was deserted, or seemed so. And at last, when Elak guessed they had penetrated far underground, they came to a metal door, strangely figured with cabalistical signs, before which Dalan paused.

"This is the heart of Elf's castle," he said softly. "Here he holds your brother captive. Elak——" The Druid fumbled under his robe, drew out a long object wrapped in cloth. He unwound the casing, revealing a short dagger, apparently carved out of crystal.

"There is strong magic in this," Dalan said, handing the weapon, hilt first, to Elak. "And it will slay the warlock where no earthly steel can spill his blood. It is the Druid knife of sacrifice."

Nodding, Elak slipped it into his belt. Dalan turned to the metal door, pushed it open. A flame of amber light blinded the two momentarily. Then their vision cleared; they stepped across the threshold. . . .

They stood on a platform that thrust out from a wall of sheer rock that towered up and to both sides and down into a fathomless immensity of golden blaze that hurt the eyes with its fires. Ahead they saw nothing but clouds—amber clouds billowing and shifting continually, drifting like the sea all about them; flame-bright, yet cool as fog in its clinging mistiness. Elak shrank back involuntarily before the strangeness of the spectacle.

"Steady!" The Druid's huge hand gripped him. "Steady, now. We've a perilous road here—watch!"

Something swam into view from the mists to the left, a black object that seemed like a huge flat-topped globe as it slipped silently closer. Hanging unsupported in the amber fog it emerged, drifting forward until it hung not a foot from the edge of the platform on which the two men stood. Now Elak saw that it was indeed a globe, like an orange with its top sliced off, hollowed out into a great cup.

"We ride that chariot!" Dalan whispered. "Follow me."

He lumbered forward a few steps and sprang. The brown-robed, gross figure hurtled above the golden depths, plunged down safely within the hollow globe. It did not even sway beneath the impact.

"Elak!" The Druid had turned, was beckoning. "Hurry!"

The tall adventurer dared give himself no time to think; he leaped, his heart hammering. Almost he overshot the mark, but Dalan's hands clutched him, lifting him to safety. White-faced, Elak stood erect on legs which were not quite steady.

The rim of the globe was waist-high. The diameter of the circular floor was about four feet, made of some unfamiliar jet-black substance he did not recognize.

The weird chariot swung in its orbit, skirting bare rock walls. The platform from which they had leaped was lost in the golden haze. They drifted through an endless sea of cool fire. . . .

As GRANICOR followed Dalan and Elak through the fortress he had soon come to realize that he, too, was being followed in his turn. Not guessing that the man he sought was among those who pursued him, he pressed on more swiftly —and the metal door that led to the platform above the abyss swung open under his hand as Elak leaped to the hollow globe. Guthrum stared in astonishment, not realizing until the black sphere had been lost in the mists that the noise of his pursuers was growing louder. Then he stepped across the threshold and flattened himself against the rock wall, sword lifted.

Thus Guthrum's men did not at first see the duke. They came in a mob through the doorway, yelling like wolves. One nearly went over the platform's edge as he twisted in midair, trying to halt his plunging rush. He reeled against a companion, clutching his shoulder — and neither one of them saw their slayer!

For Granicor lunged forward roaring. The sweep of his great sword toppled one Viking against the other, and they went over the brink in a flurry of arms and legs and a knife-edged shriek of despair. Before the other Northmen knew death was among them Granicor had struck again, shouting as he caught sight of Guthrum's hated face. A helm was crushed like paper, and bone shattered under the rush of the duke's steel; then blades licked out, and a cry went up from the Vikings. Three had died already—and there were more to die that day.

For Granicor moved like a pestilence, iron muscles in his great-thewed body toughened by his hatred of King Guthrum. His brand fell and swung and murdered in a crash of ringing steel there above the golden abysses, and though he was unarmored no thrust or cut seemed to have power to hurt him. Three he killed, and was wounded in breast and back and thigh. Blood gushed out through his tattered rags. Then even the hardy Vikings felt a shudder of horror go through them, for this madman, his body warped with torture, wounded almost to death—*laughed!* Granicor shouted with laughter, the insane glee that rose resistlessly within him as he cut his way toward Guthrum. Blood gushed from the half-healed wounds on hands and feet, mingling with the crimson welter that flooded the platform.

One man's head leaped from his shoulders; and on the back sweep of the sword Granicor drove steel deep into a Viking's side, slicing through chain-mail like cardboard. He dashed blood and sweat from his eyes with a shapeless paw—saw one giant figure before him, a huge redbeard whose ax was driving down, screaming through cleft air. The duke leaped in, blade slashing.

The ax bit deep into Granicor's back. He shouted, stiffened. The sword dropped from his hands. In the bitter eyes of Guthrum a black laughter rose.

But the duke was not yet dead. He swayed, face contorted, clawing empti-

ness. He looked up and saw Guthrum, standing alone above corpses, the only Northman left alive.

Roaring, he sprang.

Steel fingers locked in Guthrum's hairy throat. Weaponless, Granicor made of his body a human projectile that drove the red-bearded giant back and down—back to the platform's edge—and beyond!

The two men plunged into the abyss, locked in a death-grip, Duke Granicor shouting mad triumph.

But from the Viking king came no sound as he fell through the golden mists to death.

12. *Warlock and Druid*

SWINGING through empty space went the hollow globe with Elak and Dalan within it, on and on in a great curve till at last something loomed out of the dimness ahead. The Druid drew in his breath sharply.

"Leap after me, Elak—and swiftly."

A pinnacle, a tower, a jagged eidolon of granite swam into view, lifting from amber fog-clouds. Dalan climbed laboriously on the sloping, waist-high rim, crouching there. The steep crag drifted closer. And the Druid sprang—scrabbled with hand and foot to cling to the dangerously angled rock. Elak followed, knowing a sickening instant of cold horror as he felt beneath him incredible depths of emptiness. Then they stood together on the slope — and Dalan pointed to a tunnel mouth just above them.

"There's our road, Elak. Come."

They stumbled cautiously toward the cryptic opening in the rocks. It led to a short tunnel, leading downward, very dimly lighted by the amber glow that filtered from the mouth. At the end of the passage was a door. It was unlocked; Dalan swung it open. Just beyond the threshold, on the rock floor, was a lamp, its bright flame illuminating every detail of the cave that lay before them.

It was empty save for a small square altar of dark stone, and the figure of a man who knelt before it, staring into the coldly yellow depths of a jewel he clasped in stiff hands.

"Orander!" Elak almost shouted.

There was no answer.

Orander of Cyrena, Elak's brother, knelt as though carved from stone, his intent gaze riveted upon the jewel he gripped. He was younger than Elak, yet, somehow, he seemed older. Golden hair, unbound, grew in a leonine mane over the well-shaped head. There was strength in the king's face—power, and something of nobility.

But the man was—*veiled!*

Over his features there lay, like the shadow of death, an impalpable darkness, intangible, yet conveying a definite air of *withdrawal.* It seemed to Elak that, strangely, his brother was very far away, though his body was only a few feet distant. And even as he called again he knew that Orander would not hear.

"The king is lost to Cyrena," Dalan said quietly. "There is strong sorcery in the yellow jewel."

"I'll waken him, then," Elak grunted, moving forward. Suddenly he paused. Amazement flooded his lean face. For a second he seemed to strive futilely against empty air. His hands went out, seeming to slide across an invisible wall that blocked his way.

"Strong sorcery!" the Druid said. "No—don't use your rapier. You'd shatter it. There's only one way to reach Orander—and it's a perilous one."

At Elak's impatient gesture Dalan turned to the lamp. Swiftly he extinguished it, and shut the door so that the yellow glow could not filter in. Intense blackness darkened the cave.

"There's only one road by which we can reach the king, Elak—a road I've never traveled. Watch."

Elak obeyed. He could see nothing. Flashing light-images played before his pupils, but gradually these faded and vanished. They were alone in darkness.

Then he saw a tiny pin-point of yellow light.

"Do you see it?" Dalan muttered. Elak grunted assent.

"Then follow it. Keep the light constantly before your eyes. Walk forward slowly until—until——"

The Druid's voice faded oddly and was lost in silence. Without hesitation Elak stepped toward the tiny yellow light. He expected to crash into the invisible barrier that had blocked his path, but it did not materialize. After he had advanced a dozen paces he paused. Orander should now be almost at his side.

Urgently came Dalan's hoarse voice. "Go on! Quickly!"

The yellow light had vanished. For a moment Elak searched for it vainly; then, dimly, he saw it, winking like a tiny star. He moved on again, and as he did the light grew brighter.

Yet it was only a pin-point, guiding him through utter blackness. As he went on he realized that he had traversed the length of the cave, and should crash against the rock wall. Yet he did not. And the rock beneath his feet had a different feel—softer, more elastic.

Suddenly there was a moment of frightful vertigo, a wrenching jar that tore at every atom of his body. He felt utterly disoriented—strangely lost, curiously conscious of movement he could not analyze.

The darkness fled away and was gone. Cool yellow light was all around him. At Elak's side was the Druid—but no longer were they in the cave.

They stood on a glowing plain of amber, under a golden sky that was sunless and luminous. All around them was a featureless, coldly blazing expanse, stretching endlessly into infinity.

"Ishtar!" Elak's voice was hushed. "Where are we, Dalan? This isn't—earth."

"No. We are in a far place now, and a dangerous one. We passed through a door into another world."

"A door?"

"The yellow jewel," Dalan said. "It is the bridge between our land and this world. More than that——"

The Druid broke off, staring. The distant glowing plains seemed to be undergoing an incredible transformation—lifting, rising like great waves, marching forward from the horizons toward the two men.

Elak caught a glimpse of Dalan's face, startled and apprehensive, and then the two were jerked apart. A gap widened in the earth between them. Elak caught a flashing glimpse of abysmal depths where red-orange fire glowed. He seemed to be spinning through empty space, rocketing across the great plain with furious speed. Briefly the world seemed to close about him, as though he were being crushed between the vast plains which had somehow been folded in around him. He clutched his rapier-hilt in hopeless desperation.

And then he stood alone on the great shining plain. Nothing else was visible but the brazen amber sky; the Druid had vanished. It was utterly silent.

"Elak," a soft voice called. The tall adventurer turned. He saw no one.

Then, from empty air, there sprang—a shadow! Two-dimensional, unreal, it grew darker, took on form and substance. As Elak gazed, a man grew into visibility and stood watching him, a slim, blue-

eyed youth with soft flaxen hair. He wore a doeskin tunic, his only weapon a dirk girded at his belt. In his hand he gripped a harp.

Elak remembered the face he had seen in Dalan's crystal globe on the galley—the face of Elf the warlock, the same on which he looked now. And again he sensed the ageless, incredible evil that lurked in the depths of the candid blue eyes, watching as a devil might peer through a mask.

"I am Elf," the warlock said. "But I think you know that." He did not move as Elak unsheathed his rapier, crouching menacingly, one foot forward.

"Yes, I know it," the tall adventurer answered warily. "Where's Dalan? Bring him here—or I'll let blood flow from your throat before you can move to cast a spell."

Elf smiled. "No, my business is with you. Elak—you have spoiled my plans. But I have no wish to kill you. Instead, I'd rather see you on the throne of Cyrena."

"Eh?" Elak did not lower his blade. "What are you trying now? Bring Dalan here, I say!"

"Dalan has lied to you. He said I had your brother captive——"

"And I saw him! Your lies won't help."

"He's here, yes," Elf admitted. "But not a captive. In Cyrena he was a king. But in this land of mine he is more. I have made him—a god!"

"What are you talking about?" Elak snapped. "You're playing for time. Bring——"

The warlock swept his hand over the harp's strings. Throbbing sweetness, with a poignant undertone of bitterness, rang out. Instantly they were in utter blackness.

And at that moment Elak thrust with his rapier, thrust at empty air. Cursing, he slashed blindly about. Suddenly the darkness lifted.

For an instant Elak saw his brother's face hovering gigantically above him, the weird veil of alienage still shrouding the strong features. In the king's eyes Elak saw withdrawal—a withdrawal so awe-inspiring that he felt momentarily cold, as though some breath of the unknown had touched him.

The voice of Elf came softly. "I have shown you Orander," the warlock murmured. "Now I shall show you more. You shall see the worlds over which the god who is Orander rules."

Again the dark veil fell.

GREAT vistas of flashing light, orange, scarlet, yellow, glittering with amazing beauty, down which fled cyclopean shadows. Slowly the vision faded and became distinct. Elak seemed to be hovering in empty air above a huge city, many-tiered and gardened, that rose on the summit of a mountain beneath him.

Fantastic splendor ruled the city. Shining domes and minarets rose high above the wide marble streets, and arches and bridges spanned the lakes and canals where water—glowing with yellow radiance — moved sluggishly between its banks. The inhabitants of the city were not human.

They were beasts—and yet more than beasts. Elak was reminded of giant colossi of stone, winged monsters, bearded and talc-winged, lion-bodied, sleekly beautiful. Smoothly powerful muscles rolled beneath the satin pelts. And wise, wise and ancient beyond all imagination, were the faces that Elak saw. The plumes of the vari-colored wings fluttered in the gentle breeze that swept over the mountain-top, honey-sweet, spiced with odors redolent of Eastern lands.

"It is Athorama," Elf's voice mur-

mured from empty air. "Over all this splendor Orander rules."

Blackness fell again, and, lifting, disclosed a sea-girt city, where the yellow light was tinged with a dim green glow —a white city clothed in green and scarlet, blue and purple. Vegetation wound up the towers, and serpentine trees writhed and twisted in the streets. Very slowly moved the men and women of this city—clad in flowing garments that trailed behind them eerily in the dimness. And there were vague shadows swimming to and fro. . . .

"It is Lur," said Elf. "It is sunken Lur. And over this also is Orander a god."

Darkness fell, and lifted to disclose the amber-glowing plain on which Elak stood. Beside him was the warlock, smiling gently. He lifted a hand as Elak's blade flickered.

"Wait. You have seen these worlds which I made for Orander's pleasure, in which all moves and is ordered as he desires. Now I shall show you the king again."

The harp hummed eerily. In the ochre glow of the sky, clouds grew, shaping themselves in oddly patterned order. Slowly the vague outline of a face began to appear above them—the face of Orander, King of Cyrena. The eyes seemed to dwell on something infinitely far away. The titan face hung in the sky, fantastically huge and distant.

"Orander," the warlock said. "Here is Elak."

There was no change in the giant face, nor did the lips move; yet a voice said distinctly and coldly:

"I hear."

Elak felt an icy shock go through him at the sound of that voice. It belonged to something which was no longer human. But because he knew that it was also Orander's voice, he fought back his horror and called the king's name.

"I hear," the voice said again. "I know why you have come. It is useless. Go back."

"You're putting words into the mouth of a phantom," Elak snarled, swinging round to face Elf.

"It is I, once Orander. Elf has made me a god, and he has built me worlds for my pleasure. Go back."

"You see," the warlock said, his gaze meeting Elak's frankly. "Would you rob a god of his worlds? I put no enchantment on Orander. The king asked me to grant him this boon, and with my magic I did so—made worlds over which your brother rules. Would you drag him back to Cyrena—a place from which he fled?"

Elak did not answer. A frown darkened his face. Elf went on slowly.

"Dalan was jealous of my power; that was all. He tried to lead Cyrena against me, and in self-defense I sought the Northmen's aid, for I could not call on Orander. Join me, Elak—you can sit on Cyrena's throne, and my magic will serve you. Forget the Druid's lies!"

Doubtfully Elak lowered his rapier. "I don't want to rule," he said. "I seek no crowns. I came here to win back Cyrena from invaders, and to free my brother. But——"

"But Orander does not wish to be freed——"

"You lie!"

Dalan's voice! Elak's head jerked up. He stared at the sky—to where, beside the titan face of Orander, hung another face, hog-fat, toad-ugly, glaring down at Elf.

"Mider!" roared the Druid. "By Mider—you seek to stuff Elak's head with lies? Your spells won't aid you now—you spew of serpents!"

The warlock looked up unmoving. And the voice of Dalan thundered on from the sky.

"My magic is stronger than yours—else I'd not be here now. Ay, you seek to enlist Elak's aid, for you dare not fight him—not while he carries the Druid knife of sacrifice."

Elf's lips were twisted in a venomous snarl. But the Druid ignored him, bellowed:

"Elak! There's foul enchantment on Orander. He's glamored by the damned witchery of Elf's poison, by the spell cast on him unawares—but he can be called back to Cyrena, and he'll thank you for it. No man is made to be a god, and there'll be a fearful doom on Orander unless he's called back. Speak to him of Cyrena—of his people, Elak!"

For a second the adventurer hesitated, staring up at the cyclopean face of the king. Then, suddenly, he lifted his rapier with a shout. He had seen something change in the god-face, and the veil of horror had lifted from the alien eyes.

"Orander!" Elak cried. "Orander—come back to Cyrena! The sea cliffs are harried by Northmen, and dragon ships bring invaders with torch and sword. The chiefs have risen—but they need a king, else Cyrena will fall again.

"Orander, remember your kingdom—remember the fields of your land, green in the warm sunlight, silver under the moon. Remember the steadings and the cattle of your people—Sharn Forest, and the Druid altars.

"The mountains and plains of Cyrena, your warhorse and your sword, remember all these! Remember those who held the throne before you without failing—remember the blood and steel that make up your kingdom. Orander—come back to Cyrena!"

The titan face was no longer that of a god. It looked down on Elak, the face of Orander, Cyrena's king. His pulses surged with triumph as he heard the Druid shout:

"Shatter the jewel, Orander—shatter the demon jewel you hold!"

Simultaneously there came a thunder and a crashing as of riven worlds, and the ochre light vanished from the sky. The tumult roared all about Elak, the darkness broken by flashing, brief light-images. The ruins of sunken Lur sank down in thunder; the huge and splendid city of Athorama crashed in terrible destruction down the mountain, while the mitered beasts flew screaming, beating the air with frantic pinions. All around Elak was the death-cry of a ruined universe, and it swelled and rose to a dreadful crescendo of terror.

He saw Elf's face, twisted into a Gorgon mask of hate and fury, rushing toward him; something like the coil of a great serpent swept about his body. The rapier was gone, but he remembered the crystal dagger in his belt, clawed out the Druid blade. He drove it again and again into the cold, scaly thing that gripped him, unseen in the darkness that had fallen. Chill flesh seemed to shrink from beneath his attack.

Then he felt fangs closing on his throat, ripped out desperately with the dagger. There was a single frightful scream of deathly agony, and in a moment of blazing light Elak saw the body of Elf falling into a fathomless gulf that loomed below him. As he watched, the warlock's figure seemed to be wrenched asunder by some unseen power that waited in the abyss. And again darkness fell—and silence.

There was a low wheezing and scrambling near by, and light flickered up dimly. Elak saw the Druid bending over

a lighted lamp, and realized with incredulity that he stood in the cave of the black altar. Swiftly he turned.

A man was rising to his feet—and on the stones around him lay splintered yellow shards. Orander—no longer tranced by Elf's magic, no longer under a spell. The king's eyes met Elak's.

The adventurer leaped forward, gripped his brother's arms. "Orander! Ishtar be praised!"

"Praise Mider, rather," Dalan said drlyl. "And praise Orander for shattering the jewel and breaking the spell." An expression of malevolent triumph came over the ugly face. "But you've slain Elf, Elak, and for that you have my thanks, May his soul be tortured through eternity in the Nine Hells!"

FROM a turret of King Orander's castle Dalan watched three figures ride south weeks later. His heavy shoulders lifted in a shrug. Beside him Orander smiled a little sadly.

"He wouldn't stay, Dalan. And I'm sorry for that."

He was wise," the Druid said. "A country should have but one hero, its king. Best let him go in peace, lest quarrels come if he had stayed."

"No. There would be no quarrels. But Zeulas—Elak, as he calls himself—is a wanderer. He will not change now, though I urged him. So he rides south again, with Lycon and Velia at his side."

The figures on horseback grew small on the plain—two who rode very close together, and one who followed at a little distance, reeling in his saddle and keeping his balance only by occasionally gripping the beast's mane. Elak and Velia talked, with soft laughter and high hearts, as they cantered onward—and behind them, Lycon, in his own fashion, was happy also.

"Wine," he murmured thickly to himself. "Goatskins of it. Good wine, too! The gods are very good. . . ."

[THE END]

The Doom that Came to Sarnath

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

Another weird fantasy by a late great master of bizarre and fantastic literature

THERE is in the land of Mnar a vast still lake that is fed by no stream, and out of which no stream flows. Ten thousand years ago there stood by its shore the mighty city of Sarnath, but Sarnath stands there no more.

It is told that in the immemorial years when the world was young, before ever the men of Sarnath came to the land of Mnar, another city stood beside the lake; the gray stone city of Ib, which was old as the lake itself, and peopled with beings not pleasing to behold. Very odd and ugly were these beings, as indeed are most beings of a world yet inchoate and rudely fashioned. It is written on the brick cylinders of Kadatheron that the beings of Ib were in hue as green as the lake and the mists that rise above it; that they had bulging eyes, pouting, flabby lips, and curious ears, and were without voice. It is also written that they descended one night from the moon in a mist; they and the vast still lake and gray stone city Ib. However this may be, it is certain that they worshipped a sea-green stone idol chiseled in the likeness of Bokrug, the great water-lizard; before which they danced horribly when the moon was gibbous. And it is written in the papyrus of Ilarnek, that they one day discovered fire, and thereafter kindled flames on many ceremonial occasions. But not much is written of these beings, because they lived in very ancient times, and man is young, and knows but little of the very ancient living things.

After many eons men came to the land of Mnar, dark shepherd folk with their fleecy flocks, who built Thraa, Ilarnek, and Kadatheron on the winding river Ai. And certain tribes, more hardy than the rest, pushed on to the border of the lake and built Sarnath at a spot where precious metals were found in the earth.

Not far from the gray city of Ib did the wandering tribes lay the first stones of Sarnath, and at the beings of Ib they marveled greatly. But with their marveling was mixed hate, for they thought it not meet that beings of such aspect should walk about the world of men at dusk. Nor did they like the strange sculptures upon the gray monoliths of Ib, for those sculptures were terrible with antiquity. Why the beings and the sculptures lingered so late in the world, even until the coming of men, none can tell; unless it was because the land of Mnar is very still, and remote from most other lands, both of waking and of dream.

As the men of Sarnath beheld more of the beings of Ib their hate grew, and it was not less because they found the beings weak, and soft as jelly to the touch of stones and arrows. So one day the young warriors, the slingers and the spearmen and the bowmen, marched against Ib and slew all the inhabitants thereof, pushing the queer bodies into the lake with long spears, because they

did not wish to touch them. And because they did not like the gray sculptured monoliths of Ib they cast these also into the lake; wondering from the greatness of the labor how ever the stones were brought from afar, as they must have been, since there is naught like them in the land of Mnar or in the lands adjacent.

Thus of the very ancient city of Ib was nothing spared, save the sea-green stone idol chiseled in the likeness of Bokrug, the water-lizard. This the young warriors took back with them as a symbol of conquest over the old gods and beings of Ib, and as a sign of leadership in Mnar. But on the night after it was set up in the temple, a terrible thing must have happened, for weird lights were seen over the lake, and in the morning the people found the idol gone and the high-priest Taran-Ish lying dead, as from some fear unspeakable. And before he died, Taran-Ish had scrawled upon the altar of chrysolite with coarse shaky strokes the sign of DOOM.

After Taran-Ish there were many high-priests in Sarnath, but never was the sea-green stone idol found. And many centuries came and went, wherein Sarnath prospered exceedingly, so that only priests and old women remembered what Taran-Ish had scrawled upon the altar of chrysolite. Betwixt Sarnath and the city of Ilarnek arose a caravan route, and the precious metals from the earth were exchanged for other metals and rare cloths and jewels and books and tools for artificers and all things of luxury that are known to the people who dwell along the winding river Ai and beyond. So Sarnath waxed mighty and learned and beautiful, and sent forth conquering armies to subdue the neighboring cities; and in time there sate upon a throne in Sarnath the kings of all the land of Mnar and of many lands adjacent.

The wonder of the world and the pride of all mankind was Sarnath the magnificent. Of polished desert-quarried marble were its walls, in height three hundred cubits and in breadth seventy-five, so that chariots might pass each other as men drove them along the top. For full five hundred stadia did they run, being open only on the side toward the lake where a green stone sea-wall kept back the waves that rose oddly once a year at the festival of the destroying of Ib. In Sarnath were fifty streets from the lake to the gates of the caravans, and fifty more intersecting them. With onyx were they paved, save those whereon the horses and camels and elephants trod, which were paved with granite. And the gates of Sarnath were as many as the landward ends of the streets, each of bronze, and flanked by the figures of lions and elephants carven from some stone no longer known among men. The houses of Sarnath were of glazed brick and chalcedony, each having its walled garden and crystal lakelet. With strange art were they builded, for no other city had houses like them; and travelers from Thraa and Ilarnek and Kadatheron marveled at the shining domes wherewith they were surmounted.

But more marvelous still were the palaces and the temples, and the gardens made by Zokkar the olden king. There were many palaces, the least of which were mightier than any in Thraa or Ilarnek or Kadatheron. So high were they that one within might sometimes fancy himself beneath only the sky; yet when lighted with torches dipt in the oil of Dother their walls showed vast paintings of kings and armies, of a splendor at once inspiring and stupefying to the beholder. Many were the pillars of the palaces, all of tinted marble, and carven into designs of surpassing beauty. And in most of the places the floors were mo-

saics of beryl and lapis lazuli and sardonyx and carbuncle and other choice materials, so disposed that the beholder might fancy himself walking over beds of the rarest flowers. And there were likewise fountains, which cast scented waters about in pleasing jets arranged with cunning art. Outshining all others was the palace of the kings of Mnar and of the lands adjacent. On a pair of golden crouching lions rested the throne, many steps above the gleaming floor. And it was wrought of one piece of ivory, though no man lives who knows whence so vast a piece could have come. In that palace there were also many galleries, and many amphitheaters where lions and men and elephants battled at the pleasure of the kings. Sometimes the amphitheaters were flooded with water conveyed from the lake in mighty aqueducts, and then were enacted stirring sea-fights, or combats betwixt swimmers and deadly marine things.

Lofty and amazing were the seventeen tower-like temples of Sarnath, fashioned of a bright multi-colored stone not known elsewhere. A full thousand cubits high stood the greatest among them, wherein the high-priests dwelt with a magnificence scarce less than that of the kings. On the ground were halls as vast and splendid as those of the palaces; where gathered throngs in worship of Zo-Kalar and Tamash and Lobon, the chief gods of Sarnath, whose incense-enveloped shrines were as the thrones of monarchs. Not like the eikons of other gods were those of Zo-Kalar and Tamash and Lobon. For so close to life were they that one might swear the graceful bearded gods themselves sate on the ivory thrones. And up unending steps of zircon was the tower-chamber, wherefrom the high-priests looked out over the city and the plains and the lake by day; and at the cryptic moon and significant stars and planets, and their reflections in the lake, at night. Here was done the very secret and ancient rite in detestation of Bokrug, the water-lizard, and here rested the altar of chrysolite which bore the Doom-scrawl of Taran-Ish.

Wonderful likewise were the gardens made by Zokkar the olden king. In the center of Sarnath they lay, covering a great space and encircled by a high wall. And they were surmounted by a mighty dome of glass, through which shone the sun and moon and planets when it was clear, and from which were hung fulgent images of the sun and moon and stars and planets when it was not clear. In summer the gardens were cooled with fresh odorous breezes skilfully wafted by fans, and in winter they were heated with concealed fires, so that in those gardens it was always spring. There ran little streams over bright pebbles, dividing meads of green and gardens of many hues, and spanned by a multitude of bridges. Many were the waterfalls in their courses, and many were the lilied lakelets into which they expanded. Over the streams and lakelets rode white swans, whilst the music of rare birds chimed in with the melody of the waters. In ordered terraces rose the green banks, adorned here and there with bowers of vines and sweet blossoms, and seats and benches of marble and porphyry. And there were many small shrines and temples where one might rest or pray to small gods.

EACH year there was celebrated in Sarnath the feast of the destroying of Ib, at which time wine, song, dancing and merriment of every kind abounded. Great honors were then paid to the shades of those who had annihilated the odd ancient beings, and the memory of those beings and of their elder gods was derided by dancers and lutanists crowned

with roses from the gardens of Zokkar. And the kings would look out over the lake and curse the bones of the dead that lay beneath it.

At first the high-priests liked not these festivals, for there had descended amongst them queer tales of how the sea-green eikon had vanished, and how Taran-Ish had died from fear and left a warning. And they said that from their high tower they sometimes saw lights beneath the waters of the lake. But as many years passed without calamity even the priests laughed and cursed and joined in the orgies of the feasters. Indeed, had they not themselves, in their high tower, often performed the very ancient and secret rite in detestation of Bokrug, the water-lizard? And a thousand years of riches and delight passed over Sarnath, wonder of the world.

Gorgeous beyond thought was the feast of the thousandth year of the destroying of Ib. For a decade had it been talked of in the land of Mnar, and as it drew nigh there came to Sarnath on horses and camels and elephants men from Thraa, Ilarnek, and Kadatheron, and all the cities of Mnar and the lands beyond. Before the marble walls on the appointed night were pitched the pavilions of princes and the tents of travelers. Within his banquet-hall reclined Nargis-Hei, the king, drunken with ancient wine from the vaults of conquered Pnoth, and surrounded by feasting nobles and hurrying slaves. There were eaten many strange delicacies at that feast; peacocks from the distant hills of Implan, heels of camels from the Bnazic desert, nuts and spices from Cydathrian groves, and pearls from wave-washed Mtal dissolved in the vinegar of Thraa. Of sauces there were an untold number, prepared by the subtlest cooks in all Mnar, and suited to the palate of every feaster. But most prized of all the viands were the great fishes from the lake, each of vast size, and served upon golden platters set with rubies and diamonds.

Whilst the king and his nobles feasted within the palace, and viewed the crowning dish as it awaited them on golden platters, others feasted elsewhere. In the tower of the great temple the priests held revels, and in pavilions without the walls the princes of neighboring lands made merry. And it was the high-priest Gnai-Kah who first saw the shadows that descended from the gibbous moon into the lake, and the damnable green mists that arose from the lake to meet the moon and to shroud in a sinister haze the towers and the domes of fated Sarnath. Thereafter those in the towers and without the walls beheld strange lights on the water, and saw that the gray rock Akurion, which was wont to rear high above it near the shore, was almost submerged. And fear grew vaguely yet swiftly, so that the princes of Ilarnek and of far Rokol took down and folded their tents and pavilions and departed, though they scarce knew the reason for their departing.

THEN, close to the hour of midnight, all the bronze gates of Sarnath burst open and emptied forth a frenzied throng that blackened the plain, so that all the visiting princes and travelers fled away in fright. For on the faces of this throng was writ a madness born of horror unendurable, and on their tongues were words so terrible that no hearer paused for proof. Men whose eyes were wild with fear shrieked aloud of the sight within the king's banquet-hall, where through the windows were seen no longer the forms of Nargis-Hei and his nobles and slaves, but a horde of indescribable green voiceless things with bulging eyes, pouting, flabby lips, and curious ears; things which danced horribly, bearing in their paws golden platters set with rubies

and diamonds and containing uncouth flames. And the princes and travelers, as they fled from the doomed city of Sarnath on horses and camels and elephants, looked again upon the mist-begetting lake and saw the gray rock Akurion was quite submerged. Through all the land of Mnar and the lands adjacent spread the tales of those who had fled from Sarnath, and caravans sought that accursed city and its precious metals no more. It was long ere any travelers went thither, and even then only the brave and adventurous young men of yellow hair and blue eyes, who are no kin to the men of Mnar. These men indeed went to the lake to view Sarnath; but though they found the vast still lake itself, and the gray rock Akurion which rears high above it near the shore, they beheld not the wonder of the world and pride of all mankind. Where once had risen walls of three hundred cubits and towers yet higher, now stretched only the marshy shore, and where once had dwelt fifty million of men now crawled only the detestable water-lizard. Not even the mines of precious metals remained. DOOM had come to Sarnath.

But half buried in the rushes was spied a curious green idol; an exceeding ancient idol chiseled in the likeness of Bokrug, the great water-lizard. That idol, enshrined in the high temple at Ilarnek, was subsequently worshipped beneath the gibbous moon throughout the land of Mnar.

Outlanders

To David Warren Ryder

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

By desert-deepened wells and chasmed ways,
And noon-high passes of the crumbling nome
Where the fell sphinx and martichoras roam;
Over black mountains lit by meteor-blaze,
Through darkness ending not in solar days,
Beauty, the centauress, has brought us home
To shores where chaos climbs in starry foam,
And the white horses of Polaris graze.

We gather, on those gulfward beaches rolled,
Driftage of worlds not shown by any chart;
And pluck the fabled moly from wild scaurs:
Though these are scorned by human wharf and mart—
And scorned alike the red, primeval gold
For which we fight the griffins in strange wars.

Death Dallies Awhile

By LESLIE F. STONE

Within that microscopic universe created by the genius of a great scientist, men prayed frantically for the death that was denied them

"WELL, Talal Tar," sighed Nikro Nor with some weariness, "this great experiment of ours is at end. I know now both the origin of life and its meaning. You and I have brought a micro-universe into being, watched hot stars evolve, planets form, life created out of a blob of protoplasm. You and I have treated this life-germ with every device known to our science. We have given it the impetus to live, to grow, to evolve into the higher forms of life, equal to our own. We have trained death-rays upon it, and we have dissected it, studied it in all its stages of growth. We have instilled ideas in its brain, given it a concept of a godhead; we have forced thoughts of war upon it, of high ideals, of scientific achievement. And now we are done. We know what the soul is, what is life itself. And I am satisfied. You may, at your leisure, disassemble the globe.

"It's been an interesting work, eh?"

Nikro Nor gazed at his assistant with kindly eye. He loved Talal Tar as a son. He had never had an assistant to equal him in loyalty or intellect. Foremost scientist of Guerm that he was, he rated Talal Tar as second only to himself.

The younger man looked up from his ultra-ultramicroscope. "Ay, it has been interesting, Master, absorbingly so. But I—I——" He stammered as he eyed the object his master had given orders to destroy.

"Yes, Talal Tar?"

"I—I realize I am presuming, Master, but I—well, I dislike the thought of—of disassembling the micro-universe. I feel as if I—er—we——"

"I know, my good friend. You have taken this experiment to heart more than I—you cannot destroy that which you have helped to create. But really, I cannot see how their fleeting little lives, less than a few minutes' time, can fill you with such reverence. I had hoped—but never mind. You have been faithful, and you have done as much as I. It was you who thought of giving them a God. It was you who instilled the idea of life after death. I gave them life of body, you gave them spiritual being! And I came along with pestilence, war, horror! They should hate me—just as they should respect you."

"Ay, they call you the Grim Reaper, Master, Death the Destroyer!"

"I can understand that. I have taken babes from their mother's breast, young children in full expectancy. But I have also relieved the sick of their ills, the aged of their infirmities, the depressed of their prison. Only thus could I know the full meaning of Life. Have they a name for you?"

"I am not certain, Master, for they give me many guises. I—I like to think that which they worship beyond all else—Love—designates me.

"It has been most difficult, delving into brains so small. Sometimes the thought impulses are so slight. And if I awaken them, their fears are too great to permit clear thoughts to rise to the surface." Talal Tar pointed to the minute thing

upon the microscope slide. Having found it impossible to revolve them into sight with an instrument that magnified microns to thousands, he had developed his own lenses that made it possible to see an object one hundred-thousandth of a micron. And by its means one could see the midget thing that was in human likeness, eyes closed, wearing the microscopic "thought-amplifier" of Nikro Nor's invention. One of the Little Ones of the micro-universe.

Much as he disliked taking the Infinitesimals from the midst of home and family, it had to be done so that Talal Tar could fathom the brain. He knew that "back home" the mite was one of the "missing," one of hundreds that "disappeared" annually from their known haunts, never to be seen again.

Once he had tried putting the microscopic creatures back on their native heath when he was finished with them, but he found they knew only great unhappiness, in consequence. For no matter how quickly he worked over them, the ticking seconds marked the passage of all they had been familiar with on the home planet. A century might pass upon their tiny world while he picked answers to his questioning from their sleeping minds. Unlike Nikro Nor, he could not kill them outright. Therefore, when his work was done his tiny subjects were placed upon another world, shielded from the death-rays where they could enjoy the company of their fellows, likewise torn from their own people.

"And so—if I give you the Globe, Talal Tar? You will continue the experiment? And what line of departure will you take from our past methods? Or will you continue the work I have been following?"

"I—I would make but one change, Master, if it is to be permitted. I would turn off the death-rays! I would like the Little Ones to live on, out of their minute of life to enjoy the benefits of their own science! You know that many times of late they have thwarted you, holding back the tide of death for a moment. They hate so—to die. I would like them to live on—as they wish."

"I see. A noble experiment. You and I might wish for the same gift. Talal Tar, the micro-universe is your own."

With that Nikro Nor turned to his notebook, to inscribe finis to his records. He scarcely noticed that Talal Tar moved across the chamber to the huge globe filling one portion of the room, and on which were fitted half a dozen small mechanisms. Directly to one of these mechanisms Talal walked, and threw back a lever. Then he put his eyes to the eye-piece, which was an intricacy of delicate ground lenses of varying degrees of thickness.

2

DOCTOR HORACE STACK sat at the bedside of his dying patient. Hour after hour had passed, and still the ancient lingered on, refusing to let go his tenuous hold upon life. "I can't understand it," the doctor muttered. "By all right this man should have been dead ten hours ago. His heart is rotten—and yet it continues to pump, pump."

In the delivery room of the Bennington Lying-in Home the obstetrician stood up with a slow, tired smile wreathing his face. "The mother will live, poor thing. This is her fourth still-born child. I should hate to break the news to her. Here, what's that? A baby's cry!"

"Doctor! The baby's alive! It begins to breathe! A miracle."

In the accident ward of the Emergency Hospital the body over which the nurses and doctors had worked frantically for

hours without success suddenly stirred. "I don't want to live! God, don't let me live!" the would-be suicide moaned pitifully.

An old woman sat up amid her silken sheets. She chuckled. "So, my dear nephew tried to poison me, eh? And I am still alive. I warned him I would outlive him—and all the rest of my dear, loving family, waiting like vultures for my moneys. And I'll fool them all—the ingrates! I'll show them!"

The white-faced child lay stretched upon the couch, eyes staring vacantly at the weeping mother. The family physician looked on with pity.

"And he'll never be a normal child, again, doctor?"

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Moore. I can't understand how he lived after that head blow. Forgive me—but it would be better—that he had died—a witless idiot—now."

All over the earth such things were happening. There were hundreds of cases of people who should have been dead, but were not. In Europe where a war was in progress the overworked medical corps was calling for more and more aid. Of all the thousands that had fallen in battle that day, *not one was dead!* Some, horribly mangled, lived against all precedent. Men with head wounds, punctured lungs, heart wounds lived, somehow. A man with half his heart shot away lived and breathed five hours after he had been shot, and *continued to live.* Another that was only half a man also lived, moaning in awful torment. He begged one of the surgeons to put him out of his pain, and in his compassion the medical man complied. That is, he gave what he knew to be an overdose of chloroform, and yet, an hour later, he found the man *still alive!* And there were more that should have died, who in living would be mere travesties of men, unable to do for themselves, future drains upon the State.

In a mine explosion twenty miners were buried in a living tomb, beneath tons of debris. But none of them died, not even those that lay crushed under the dirt and rocks. It would be days before help could reach them, but they would live, suffering pain, hunger, thirst, disease.

From a high tower two young things that had signed a suicide pact made their leap to the ground. Unrecognizable blobs of bone, flesh and blood, they could not die, but lived on, on.

In the Alps a famous mountain-climber lost footing and dropped into a deep, narrow crevice. His companions had to return to the distant village for help to drag him to the surface. A terrific blizzard descended upon the rescue party. They were forced to wait days before they returned to the spot and retrieved the body, frozen hard. Several hours later, in the thaw of a warm room the "dead man" awoke, little the worse for his experience.

Nor did these "queer accidents" stop with human life. In the abattoir at the stockyards cattle were not dropping at the death-blow, nor sheep, nor hogs. Bellowing they staggered in their tracks, and butchers stood around not knowing what to do about it.

Mrs. Hannah Slocum was killing chickens for "company." She chopped off their heads, but the beheaded bodies continued to flop around the yard. Grabbing them up in her sturdy hands she dipped them into scalding water, and they continued to jump about the tub. Even when they were bare of their feathers they showed movement. In despair she called her husband. Scratching his bald pate, Si proposed that they try cutting the carcasses into pieces. But even he shuddered at

jumping muscles, quivering, living flesh as his knife cut through. When they were disemboweled he paled, and then screaming fled from the sight of severed organs each endowed with life.

Chef Pedro Cascro patted the plump, green, squirming lobster fresh from its salt-water bath. Lifting the lid from the pot of boiling water, he dropped the crustacean into it. Later he returned to lift the lid once more. *"Madre de Dios!"* he screamed as the scarlet-boiled lobster waved living claws in his face!

In Kenya Chester K. Morrison watched his beaters drive a young lion out of the tall grasses. In his boma of thorn bushes he put his rifle to his shoulder. He was proud of his marksmanship, and he scored a perfect shot to the heart. But the lion did not follow the rules. He did not fall, but came on, blood streaming from his wound. In one leap he cleared the thorns and threw himself snarling upon the huntsman while Jim Corbin, Morrison's paid hunter, pumped lead into the lion's side. A few moments later, when Corbin and his blacks tore the beast from the millionaire's bleeding form, both were alive, although both had wounds enough to kill two lions and two men!

Mother Flycatcher had been a very busy bird, catching her youngster's dinner. Now as she flew back to the nest she was perturbed. That last batch of insects were not behaving right in her alimentary tract. It was with great relief that she regurgitated them into her children's widening maws. But the birdlings liked the meal no better than she, this food that would not stop its wiggling and admit that it was down!

Bruin lay on the water's edge catching salmon for his dinner. One, two, three, they flopped upon the bank and continued to flop. Turning from the water the bear picked one of the fish up in his mouth. That bite should have killed, but the finny thing kept right on wiggling. Peeling a long strip of flesh from its side, the animal went about the business of chewing. Every once in a while he paused at the strange touch of the flesh wiggling between his teeth, muscles that jumped each time he bit through them. Soon all the fish were gone, but he did not feel like catching any more. His stomach was filled with strange quiverings.

Two wolves had driven their prey into a cul-de-sac amid the hills. Breathing hard through distended nostrils the deer turned to do battle. Simultaneously the pair struck, one to hamstring a hind leg, the other leaping for the slender throat. Even with a torn jugular the deer did not fall. It took the hamstringing of the other hind leg to bring it down on its haunches. Warily the wolves circled their quarry. Again they leaped, and by their weight downed the creature. But after they had torn into the hide and stripped the flesh away the poor beast shivered and quivered. Anxiously the wolves sat back on their haunches, licking their bloody chops. Again they attacked the deer. Again they withdrew from the twitching carcass.

On the first day of these world-stirring events the newspapers took little cognizance of this new situation, simply using these "freak" stories for fillers. By the second day they had to recognize the fact that something unusual was taking place. Summing up a long series of strange happenings, one smart headline writer recalled a novel of several years back and headed a column with the caption *Death Takes a Holiday,* going on to show the analogy of these real-life occurrences to the fictional episodes enumerated in the once popular book.

Two days later people were seizing upon the idea. It was no longer a joke. In four days not a single obituary notice had been printed in any newspaper in all the world!

There were those who were more than delighted, naturally; those who had lived in fear of losing dear ones, those who lived in fear of death, those who had long fought a losing battle against the destruction of animal life. The scientist was seeing a dream realized, a long future wherein he could continue to contribute to the welfare of humanity. The dictator that had foreseen his world crumbling upon his own death felt that the Powers above had put the stamp of approval upon his works. The octogenarian, living upon bread and milk, ordered a porterhouse smothered in onions to be topped by strawberry shortcake.

It was for the truly intelligent men to be frightened. They could foresee a time when Man would be driven from the face of the earth by the myriad of domestic and wild life. Slapping a mosquito did no good. The butterfly did not succumb following its day in the sun. And what of those destructive hordes of insects with which Man had always fought for his own livelihood? What would happen when the plains were overrun by cattle? What would happen when the predatory beasts of forest and field multiplied a thousandfold? What of those billions of young oysters that spawned yearly, of herring, of codfish? What would happen when the sea would no longer hold them all—none dying? And if there was to be no more death, what of the germ, the disease germ? Was all life to become diseased, and diseased live on with no surcease from living? The middle-aged that had looked longingly to that time when Man's life-span should be elongated beyond his three-score and ten were fearful, horror-struck. Life for ever? The same routine? The same worn rut? Immortality?

Death! Where was he? What was he about? Death! *Death!*

People commenced to look fearfully at the stranger in their midst. A new face could bring the sweat pouring from their glands. What if *he* were Death, in human dress, stalking among the millions—enjoying *his* joke. *Death!* where is thy sting? Death! *DEATH!* Death!

And the days, the weeks rolled on. All over all Earth not a thing died, not a cripple, not the diseased, the aged, man, mammal, reptile, fish, insect.

Man found it impossible to eat flesh that continued to twitch and quiver even after it had been in the roasting-pan, for life did not cease with the removal of the heart. Each individual cell retained its life-spark, and even weeks later muscular reflexes reacted to touch. Perforce Man became a vegetarian. He knew that plant-life knew life and death, but it, at least, had no voice, no motion. Only there was no wilting, no drying out of the sap. A felled tree remained green, and new sprouts showed after the uprooting.

Yet it was apparent that there would be no harvest that year of any great proportion. Man was not the only vegetarian. The increase of insect-life was without precedent. Birds, like man, had turned against their natural food. They could no more than man hold down the squirming, pulsing life. With the insects they devoured the fruits of the field and the orchard, they, in turn, multiplying as their enemies no longer hunted them. Predatory birds were also joining the hordes, unable to eat prey that would not die. And from the forest and the plain came the carnivorous animal, learning to eat vegetables, melons, grain; so that it was not an uncommon sight to see wolves,

deer, crow, hawks dining side by side in a corn-field! For Death had released his minions from their policing duties. All the world was becoming an Eden wherein the lion lay down with the lamb.

Only Eden it would not remain long. Mathematicians attempted to compute how many harvests would remain before the entire globe was denuded of its plant-life, but that task was too monumental for their abstractions. In desperation chemists were experimenting with green wood-pulp, devising ways and means of making it palatable. And in their hearts they cried out for the return of Death!

3

NIKRO NOR looked up from his notes with some annoyance. "You called me, Talal Tar? Heavens, man, what is wrong with you?" In wonder he surveyed the trembling form, the white face with eyes burning as if from fever. "Are you sick?"

Sadly the young scientist faced his superior. "Yes, Master, sick at heart."

"Why? What has happened to you?"

"It's the micro-universe, Master. Will you look within the Globe?"

Mystified, Nikro Nor moved toward the great silvery sphere, put his eyes to the vision-plate. With a hand that almost trembled he adjusted the lenses. Before him lay the micro-universe he had created from a handful of dust. In miniature, great suns burned in brilliant magnificence. They lay in spiral form just as the great universe of which Gal, Guerm's sun, was a part, although here and there a bit of matter had torn loose from the outer layers to form little islands of light. Great stars and small, blue-white stars, yellow stars, green stars, red stars, violet stars, and here and there a burned-out bit of dust swam in the spiral, or several of these dust-motes adhered together, obscuring living stars from view.

About a dozen stars had planetary systems. These had been most difficult to create. They had necessitated the bringing together of two star-motes to cause great enough tides so that bits of matter could be drawn away from the parent. Nikro Nor was proud of that achievement. He had written a scholarly treatise which had had wide circulation throughout Guerm.

Producing life upon the planets had been the next step. He had fashioned a delicate wand to be manipulated, from where he sat, into the plane of the spiral. After the planets had been inoculated with the life-germ they had been treated with various measures to nourish it, to make it grow, to change its form and to permit it to die once its mission in life had been accomplished. But not always had he waited for it to live its natural life-span. With the wand he killed the young infant, the growing creature, the middle-aged; and when it behooved Talal Tar or himself they used the wand to lift one of the tiny beings from the surface of its home-planet and bring it into the laboratory for dissection and study.

After his cursory study Nikro Nor could find nothing upsetting in the miniature universe. He said as much to Talal Tar.

"The planets! the planets! Adjust to combination 3-4-72 and see for yourself!"

Nikro Nor frowned. He was beginning to feel provoked over his assistant's behavior. He acted like a high-strung woman instead of a clear-thinking scientist. To humor him, however, Nikro Nor spun the designated lenses into place and watched a small bright body revolve into view. He knew it to be a planet by its reflected light. Its reddish tint showed him it was one of the barren worlds lying too close to the sun. He gave the mechanism under hand another twist so that a second planet came within his ken. For

several tense moments he studied it. Another turn and a third planet appeared. One after another he magnified a dozen planets, lying in various parts of the universe. Then he turned to Talal Tar.

"Something is apparently wrong with our Little Ones. The little worlds have a —a diseased look, but still I do not comprehend."

From its bracket Talal Tar took down a head-piece that fitted upon the temple. Tiny, almost invisible wires ran from it into the globe. "Listen!" he admonished his master.

For a moment or two Nikro Nor "listened." A puzzled expression spread across his face. At last he took the thought-amplifier off with an impatient gesture. "I never had the success with this that you have, Talal Tar. Now, out with it. What is happening to the Little Ones? What is that roar I heard?'

"Prayer, Master!"

"Prayer? For what?"

"Prayer for Death!"

"Death?"

"You recall that I told you I intended to switch off the death-rays, to give the Little Ones that which they have been seeking many generations? Immortality? Well, Master, that is just what I did do—five or ten seconds ago. I gave them life everlasting! And they ask again for Death! On every planet their hearts cry out, calling Death, Death the Destroyer!"

A gentle smile creased Nikro Nor's face. "Ah—they are wise—far wiser than I would have dared believe possible! Our Little Ones, my dear Talal Tar, have become divine of thought. It is a lesson for ourselves. By all means—give them Death. For Death is Life's greatest gift, surcease from pain, from living—from thinking. What is more miraculous than Death?" And in his heart there was no longer a fear of the Grim Stalker. . . .

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The Gray Champion

By NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

THERE was once a time when New England groaned under the actual pressure of heavier wrongs than those threatened ones which brought on the Revolution. James II, the bigoted successor of Charles the Voluptuous, had annulled the charters of all the colonies, and sent a harsh and unprincipled soldier to take away our liberties and endanger our religion. The administration of Sir Edmund Andros lacked scarcely a single characteristic of tyranny: a Governor and Council, holding office from the King, and wholly independent of the country; laws made and taxes levied without concurrence of the people, immediate or by their representatives; the rights of private citizens violated, and the titles of all landed property declared void; the voice of complaint stifled by restrictions on the press; and, finally, disaffection overawed by the first band of mercenary troops that ever marched on our free soil. For two years our ancestors were kept in sullen submission by that filial love which had invariably secured their allegiance to the mother country, whether its head chanced to be a Parliament, Protector, or Popish Monarch. Till these evil times, however, such allegiance had been merely nominal, and the colonists had ruled themselves, enjoying far more freedom than is even yet the privilege of the native subjects of Great Britain.

At length a rumor reached our shores that the Prince of Orange had ventured on an enterprise the success of which would be the triumph of civil and religious rights and the salvation of New England. It was but a doubtful whisper; it might be false, or the attempt might fail; and, in either case, the man that stirred against King James would lose his head. Still, the intelligence produced a marked effect. The people smiled mysteriously in the streets, and threw bold glances at their oppressors; while, far and wide, there was a subdued and silent agitation, as if the slightest signal would rouse the whole land from its sluggish despondency. Aware of their danger, the rulers resolved to avert it by an imposing display of strength, and perhaps to confirm their despotism by yet harsher measures. One afternoon in April, 1689, Sir Edmund Andros and his favorite councillors, being

warm with wine, assembled the redcoats of the Governor's Guard, and made their appearance in the streets of Boston. The sun was near setting when the march commenced.

The roll of the drum, at that unquiet crisis, seemed to go through the streets, less as the martial music of the soldiers, than as a muster-call to the inhabitants themselves. A multitude, by various avenues, assembled in King Street, which was destined to be the scene, nearly a century afterwards, of another encounter between the troops of Britain and a people struggling against her tyranny. Though more than sixty years had elapsed since the Pilgrims came, this crowd of their descendants still showed the strong and somber features of their character, perhaps more strikingly in such a stern emergency than on happier occasions. There was the sober garb, the general severity of mien, the gloomy but undismayed expression, the Scriptural forms of speech, and the confidence in Heaven's blessing on a righteous cause, which would have marked a band of the original Puritans, when threatened by some peril of the wilderness. Indeed, it was not yet time for the old spirit to be extinct; since there were men in the street, that day, who had worshipped there beneath the trees, before a house was reared to the God for whom they had become exiles. Old soldiers of the Parliament were here, too, smiling grimly at the thought that their aged arms might strike another blow against the house of Stuart. Here, also, were the veterans of King Philip's war, who had burned villages and slaughtered young and old, with pious fierceness, while the godly souls throughout the land were helping them with prayer. Several ministers were scattered among the crowd, which, unlike all other mobs, regarded them with such reverence, as if there were

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sanctity in their very garments. These holy men exerted their influence to quiet the people, but not to disperse them. Meantime, the purpose of the Governor, in disturbing the peace of the town at a period when the slightest commotion might throw the country into a ferment, was almost the universal subject of inquiry, and variously explained.

"Satan will strike his master-stroke presently," cried some, "because he knoweth that his time is short. All our godly pastors are to be dragged to prison! We shall see them at a Smithfield fire in King Street!"

Hereupon the people of each parish gathered closer round their minister, who looked calmly upwards and assumed a more apostolic dignity, as well befitted a candidate for the highest honor of his profession, the crown of martyrdom. It was actually fancied, at that period, that New England might have a John Rogers of her own, to take the place of that worthy in the Primer.

"The Pope of Rome has given orders for a new St. Bartholomew!" cried others. "We are to be massacred, man and male child!"

Neither was this rumor wholly discredited, although the wiser class believed the Governor's object somewhat less atrocious. His predecessor under the old charter, Bradstreet, a venerable companion of the first settlers, was known to be in town. There were grounds for conjecturing that Sir Edmund Andros intended, at once, to strike terror by a parade of military force, and to confound the opposite faction by possessing himself of their chief.

"Stand firm for the old charter, Governor!" shouted the crowd, seizing upon the idea. "The good old Governor Bradstreet!"

While this cry was at the loudest, the people were surprized by the well-known figure of Governor Bradstreet himself, a patriarch of nearly ninety, who appeared on the elevated steps of a door, and, with characteristic mildness, besought them to submit to the constituted authorities.

"My children," concluded this venerable person, "do nothing rashly. Cry not aloud, but pray for the welfare of New England, and expect patiently what the Lord will do in this matter!"

The event was soon to be decided. All this time, the roll of the drum had been approaching through Cornhill, louder and deeper, till with reverberations from house to house, and the regular tramp of martial footsteps, it burst into the street. A double rank of soldiers made their appearance, occupying the whole breadth of the passage, with shouldered matchlocks and matches burning, so as to present a row of fires in the dusk. Their steady march was like the progress of a machine, that would roll irresistibly over everything in its way. Next, moving slowly, with a confused clatter of hoofs on the pavement, rode a party of mounted gentlemen, the central figure being Sir Edmund Andros, elderly, but erect and soldier-like. Those around him were his favorite councillors, and the bitterest foes of New England. At his right hand rode Edward Randolph, our arch-enemy, that "blasted wretch," as Cotton Mather calls him, who achieved the downfall of our ancient government, and was followed with a sensible curse, through life and to his grave. On the other side was Bullivant, scattering jests and mockery as he rode along. Dudley came behind, with a downcast look, dreading, as well he might, to meet the indignant gaze of the people, who beheld him, their only countryman by birth, among the oppressors of

his native land. The captain of a frigate in the harbor, and two or three civil officers under the Crown, were also there. But the figure which most attracted the public eye, and stirred up the deepest feeling, was the Episcopal clergyman of King's Chapel, riding haughtily among the magistrates in his priestly vestments, the fitting representative of prelacy and persecution, the union of Church and State, and all those abominations which had driven the Puritans to the wilderness. Another guard of soldiers, in double rank, brought up the rear.

The whole scene was a picture of the condition of New England, and its moral, the deformity of any government that does not grow out of the nature of things and the character of the people. On one side the religious multitude, with their sad visages and dark attire, and on the other, the group of despotic rulers, with the high-churchman in the midst, and here and there a crucifix at their bosoms, all magnificently clad, flushed with wine, proud of unjust authority, and scoffing at the universal groan. And the mercenary soldiers, waiting but the word to deluge the street with blood, showed the only means by which obedience could be secured.

"O Lord of Hosts," cried a voice among the crowd, "provide a champion for thy people!"

This ejaculation was loudly uttered, and served as a herald's cry, to introduce a remarkable personage. The crowd had rolled back, and were now huddled together nearly at the extremity of the street, while the soldiers had advanced no more than a third of its length. The intervening space was empty—a paved solitude, between lofty edifices, which threw almost a twilight shadow over it. Sudden-

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ly, there was seen the figure of an ancient man, who seemed to have emerged from among the people, and was walking by himself along the center of the street, to confront the armed band. He wore the old Puritan dress, a dark cloak and a steeple-crowned hat, in the fashion of at least fifty years before, with a heavy sword upon his thigh, but a staff in his hand to assist the tremulous gait of age.

When at some distance from the multitude, the old man turned slowly round, displaying a face of antique majesty, rendered doubly venerable by the hoary beard that descended on his breast. He made a gesture at once of encouragement and warning, then turned again, and resumed his way.

"Who is this gray patriarch?" asked the young men of their sires.

"Who is this venerable brother?" asked the old men among themselves.

But none could make reply. The fathers of the people, those of fourscore years and upwards, were disturbed, deeming it strange that they should forget one of such evident authority, whom they must have known in their early days, the associate of Winthrop, and all the old councillors, giving laws, and making prayers, and leading them against the savage. The elderly men ought to have remembered him, too, with locks as gray in their youth as their own were now. And the young! How could he have passed so utterly from their memories—that hoary sire, the relic of long-departed times, whose awful benediction had surely been bestowed on their uncovered heads, in childhood?

"Whence did he come? What is his purpose? Who can this old man be?" whispered the wondering crowd.

Meanwhile, the venerable stranger, staff in hand, was pursuing his solitary walk along the center of the street. As he drew near the advancing soldiers, and as the roll of their drum came full upon his ear, the old man raised himself to a loftier mien, while the decrepitude of age seemed to fall from his shoulders, leaving him in gray but unbroken dignity. Now, he marched onward with a warrior's step, keeping time to the military music. Thus the aged form advanced on one side, and the whole parade of soldiers and magistrates on the other, till, when scarcely twenty yards remained between, the old man grasped his staff by the middle, and held it before him like a leader's truncheon.

"Stand!" cried he.

The eye, the face, and attitude of command; the solemn yet war-like peal of that voice, fit either to rule a host in the battlefields or be raised to God in prayer, were irresistible. At the old man's word and outstretched arm, the roll of the drum was hushed at once, and the advancing line stood still. A tremulous enthusiasm seized upon the multitude. That stately form, combining the leader and the saint, so gray, so dimly seen, in such an ancient garb, could only belong to some old champion of the righteous cause, whom the oppressor's drum had summoned from his grave. They raised a shout of awe and exultation, and looked for the deliverance of New England.

THE Governor, and the gentlemen of his party, perceiving themselves brought to an unexpected stand, rode hastily forward, as if they would have pressed their snorting and affrighted horses right against the hoary apparition. He, however, blenched not a step, but glancing his severe eye round the group, which half encompassed him, at last bent it sternly on Sir Edmund Andros. One

(Please turn to page 760)

Farewell to Eros

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

Lord of the many pangs, the single ecstasy!
From all my rose-red temple builded in thy name,
Pass dawnward with no blasphemies of praise or blame,
No whine of suppliant or moan of psaltery.

Not now the weary god deserts the worshipper,
The worshipper the god . . . but in some cryptic room
A tocsin tells with arras-deadened tones of doom
That hour which veils the shrine and stills the chorister. . . .

Others will make libation, chant thy litanies. . . .
But, when the glamored moons on inmost Stygia glare,
And quenchlessly the demon-calling altars flare,
I shall go forth to madder gods and mysteries.

And through Zothique and primal Thule wandering,
A pilgrim to the shrines where elder Shadows dwell,
Perhaps I shall unveil such lusters visible
As turn to ash the changeful opal of thy wing.

Haply those Islands where the sunsets sink in rest
Will yield, O Love, the slumber that thou hast not given;
Or the broad-bosomed flowers of some vermilion heaven
Will make my senses fail as on no mortal breast.

Perchance the fountains of the dolorous rivers four
In Dis, will quench the thirst thy wine assuages never;
And in my veins will mount a twice-infuriate fever
When the black, burning noons upon Cimmeria pour.

Yea, in those ultimate lands that will outlast the Earth,
Being but dream and fable, myth and fantasy,
I shall forget . . . or find some image reared of thee,
Dreadful and radiant, far from death, remote from birth.

(Continued from page 758)
would have thought that the dark old man was chief ruler there, and that the Governor and Council, with soldiers at their back, representing the whole power and authority of the Crown, had no alternative but obedience.

"What does this old fellow here?" cried Edward Randolph, fiercely. "On, Sir Edmund! Bid the soldiers forward, and give the dotard the same choice that you give all his countrymen—to stand aside or be trampled on!"

"Nay, nay, let us show respect to the good grandsire," said Bullivant, laughing. "See you not, he is some old round-headed dignitary, who hath lain asleep these thirty years, and knows nothing of the change of times? Doubtless, he thinks to put us down with a proclamation in Old Noll's name!"

"Are you mad, old man?" demanded Sir Edmund Andros, in loud and harsh tones. "How dare you stay the march of King James's Governor?"

"I have stayed the march of a king himself, ere now," replied the gray figure, with stern composure. "I am here, Sir Governor, because the cry of an oppressed people hath disturbed me in my secret place; and beseeching this favor earnestly of the Lord, it was vouchsafed me to appear once again on earth, in the good old cause of his saints. And what speak ye of James? There is no longer a Popish tyrant on the throne of England, and by tomorrow noon his name shall be a byword in this very street, where ye would make it a word of terror. Back, thou that wast a Governor, back! With this night thy power is ended—tomorrow, the prison!—back, lest I foretell the scaffold!"

The people had been drawing nearer and nearer, and drinking in the words of their champion, who spoke in accents long disused, like one unaccustomed to converse, except with the dead of many years ago. But his voice stirred their souls. They confronted the soldiers, not wholly without arms, and ready to convert the very stones of the street into deadly weapons. Sir Edmund Andros looked at the old man; then he cast his hard and cruel eye over the multitude, and beheld them burning with that lurid wrath, so difficult to kindle or to quench; and again he fixed his gaze on the aged form, which stood obscurely in an open space, where neither friend nor foe had thrust himself. What were his thoughts, he uttered no word which might discover. But whether the oppressor were overawed by the Gray Champion's look, or perceived his peril in the threatening attitude of the people, it is certain that he gave back, and ordered his soldiers to commence a slow and guarded retreat. Before another sunset, the Governor, and all that rode so proudly with him, were prisoners, and long ere it was known that James had abdicated, King William was proclaimed throughout New England.

But where was the Gray Champion? Some reported, that when the troops had gone from King Street, and the people were thronging tumultuously in their rear, Bradstreet, the aged Governor, was seen to embrace a form more aged than his own. Others soberly affirmed, that while they marveled at the venerable grandeur of his aspect, the old man had faded from their eyes, melting slowly into the hues of twilight, till, where he stood, there was an empty space. But all agreed that the hoary shape was gone. The men of that generation watched for his reappearance, in sunshine and in twilight, but never saw him more, nor knew when his funeral passed, nor where his gravestone was.

And who was the Gray Champion?

Perhaps his name might be found in the records of that stern Court of Justice, which passed a sentence, too mighty for the age, but glorious in all after times, for its humbling lesson to the monarch and its high example to the subject. I have heard, that whenever the descendants of the Puritans are to show the spirit of their sires, the old man appears again. When eighty years had passed, he walked once more in King Street. Five years later, in the twilight of an April morning, he stood on the green, beside the meeting-house, at Lexington, where now the obelisk of granite, with a slab of slate inlaid, commemorates the first fallen of the Revolution. And when our fathers were toiling at the breastwork on Bunker's Hill, all through that night the old warrior walked his rounds. Long, long may it be, ere he comes again! His hour is one of darkness, and adversity, and peril. But should domestic tyranny oppress us, or the invader's step pollute our soil, still may the Gray Champion come, for he is the type of New England's hereditary spirit, and his shadowy march, on the eve of danger, must ever be the pledge that New England's sons will vindicate their ancestry.

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SEPTEMBER 1935—Stories by: John Scott Douglas, Arlton Eadie, Paul Ernst, Clark Ashton Smith, Robert Bloch, Ethel Helene Coen, Kirk Mashburn, Edmond Hamilton, and Kenneth P. Wood.

OCTOBER 1935—Stories by: Edmond Hamilton, Paul Ernst, C. L. Moore, Seabury Quinn, John Flanders, Eando Binder, Robert Leonard Russell, and Arthur Machen.

NOVEMBER 1935—Stories by: Robert E. Howard, Paul Ernst, E. Hoffmann Price, Paul Frederick Stern, Leslie F. Stone, Tarleton Collier, and August W. Derleth.

DECEMBER 1935—Stories by: Robert E. Howard, Paul Ernst, Clark Ashton Smith, Edmond Hamilton, Harold Ward, Alfred I. Tooke, Robert Barbour Johnson, and Edward Lucas White.

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WE CANNOT iterate too often that WEIRD TALES belongs to you, the readers. We read carefully every letter of criticism that we receive, for it is only by knowing your opinion of the stories we publish that we are able to print, month after month, the kind of stories you want to read. If the magazine satisfies you, we want to know it. And if any of the tales make you want to pitch the magazine into the ash-can, we want you to reach for a postcard, or write us a letter, telling us about it. Address your letter to the Eyrie, WEIRD TALES, 840 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago.

G. H.

G. H. writes from Chicago: "Now to get down to my monthly perusal and review. Being one of those poisonously methodical persons, we will begin with the cover & say that it is just too too good. The colors are so brilliant & vivid that none but a tropical or evil garden could contain them. This artist lad has something—& lots of it, too. But somehow, tho, I had always pictured La Belle Dame Sans Merci more of the sirenic type. Finlay's drawing shows her sorta child-like, but, omi! wotta 'andsome knight is this who sees the warning specters in the gloom! Now-a-uh—this story *The Devil Deals* was really sumpin to think about. The story itself was rather obvious to me, but those cards fascinated me almost as much as they did Basil Sargent. And what a grand relief to read a Clark Ashton Smith story that is really good; that is, *The Garden of Adompha* seemed more on the trend of Smith's stories a few years back—so strangely weird—so gaspingly unreal—and ending with such abrupt finality. Boy, he left me sittin' in midair & I liked it! Virgil gives the King somewhat of a Russian aspect. Lovecraft's verse to the author sorta tells what I want to say but dunno how. And again Seabury Quinn gives his li'l French pal a rest, to turn out a lovely tale of a temple dancer. Tragic, yes—but somehow strange in a stranger setting & so wholly absorbing. *The Eyes of the Mummy* was rather dull to me, although the hypnotic jewel-eyes were something new. This *Forest of Evil* must have had a gardener related to Adompha's dwarf—there was such a strangeness in their half-animal, half-vegetable formation. The tale was quite exciting, & much to my taste, altho I would prefer to have a little friendly vegetation by way of variance—for instance, feeding a lilac bush with a honey solution instead of animal blood—and then see what happens. Y'know this *Dreadful Sleep* is one of Jack Williamson's stories that I really enjoy. The illustration of the Sleeper resembles a giant-sized grenade—I wonder if he would blow up could he be thrown. Ah—ahaha—haw haw—chuckle!—Boy, did I ever have a good time reading Hawthorne's *Feathertop!*—it sure was a lulu. It's one of those that can be read again & yet once more. Yessir, it was good. Best of all, there were no awed whisperings of witches and condemnations. This sort of gave a witch's viewpoint. Glancing thru the Eyrie, it seems most readers agree on *Alonzo Typer* & the similarity of the tale to Lovecraft's master hand—with which I wholeheartedly agree. I was impressed with E. Hoffmann Price's comments of a possible contemplated trip to the Valley of Teotihuacan, which was indefinitely postponed because two of the parties left on longer tours. . . . I still note with pleasure that *Roads* is yet a favorite. To me it is incomparable. Wow! *Pigeons from Hell* promises some of that oogy horror that makes one curl up just a little tighter in the ole armchair. Ho hum—bye now—see ya next month."

A Little Encouragement

Samuel V. Cox writes from Indianapolis: "Needless to say, I was quite pleased to note my brief letter to your department, the Eyrie, and with that encouragement I am taking the liberty to write again. Virgil Finlay's full-page illustration wins first vote in the artistic field. Seabury Quinn has excelled himself in his superb story, *The Temple Dancer.* Although the occult element is not very strongly stressed, yet the narration and style hold one's interest until the bitter end. How graphically he portrays that *'kurban'!* . . . But to the essence of my tale of woe—so many of the writers to the Eyrie complain of tales in your magazine concerned with science-fiction. To quote, L. A. Petts of Tolworth, England, states: 'The hard facts of science, the coldness of time-travel and space-travel, do not mix with much harmony with old-age romance and witchery.' Nonsense! Science is concerned in its inception with the 'hard facts' of the universe, known and unknown. Searchers after these so-called hard facts are constantly running up against phenomena which are inexplicable and particularly in the realm of astro- and bio-physics. Several of the tales that have appeared in your magazine dealing with science and the occult were not out of order with the required standards of weird fiction. A balanced diet is always best, and I have noticed you have selected this course. Keep up the good work, printing stories of occult phenomena."

By Candlelight

Mrs. Florence B. Smith writes from Los Angeles: "At last I have read WEIRD TALES in the proper setting: by candlelight, the rain pouring down, and wondering what was coming next. The day the April number arrived was the worst day of our recent deluge, but even with the electricity cut off, I could not wait to read it; so by the light of three candles I shuddered over the current number. I liked Seabury Quinn's *The Temple Dancer,* but am willing to bet that very few will, on account of the pathetic ending, but which I thought most fitting and a perfect finale. But why are you running these old reprints, that surely all of us have

BACK COPIES

Because of the many requests for back issues of WEIRD TALES, the publishers do their best to keep a sufficient supply on hand to meet all demands. This magazine was established early in 1923 and there has been a steady drain on the supply of back copies ever since. At present, we have the following back numbers on hand for sale:

1934	1935	1936	1937	1938
. . .	. . .	Jan.	. .	Jan.
. . . .	. . . .	Feb.	Feb.	Feb.
. . . .	Mar.	Mar.	. . . .	Mar.
Apr.	Apr.	Apr.	Apr.	Apr.
May	May	May		May
. . .	June	June	June	. . . .
July	July	July	July	. . . .
. . . .	Aug	. . .	Aug.	.
Sept.	Sept.	Sept.	Sept.	. . . .
Oct.	Oct.	Oct.	Oct	. . . .
Nov.	Nov.	Nov.	Nov.	. . . .
Dec.	Dec.	Dec.	Dec.	. . . .

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read years and years ago? They take *me* back to 'English Lit' in boarding-school, and I would just as soon forget those days. I do not think they come under the weird category anyway, and they take up far too much space; I hope that you get a lot of raps on this same subject, and stop digging into the old classics for your reprints. I was so glad that *Roads* met with so much acclaim; I thought it was wonderful, and worthy of being published by itself, for a lovelier Christmas story was never written. Finlay's covers and illustrations are perfect. I only wish there were more in each issue, for they add a lot to any story. Thank you for all the good things you are giving us, but *please* lay off Hawthorne and Co."

Shivering Under the Bed-Clothes

Eleanor Braley writes: "I have been reading WT since I was a kid. I spent a good many nights shivering under the bed-clothes and wondering if something was going to reach out of the dark and snatch me. Now since I am a 'big' girl and Mama can't spank any more, I wish I had every copy ever printed. Can't you find more stories to publish like *The Thief of Forthe* and *The Quest of the Starstone?* I am just cr-rayzy about Seabury Quinn's stories. And oh my soul and body, did I quake in my boots when I read *The Diary of Alonzo Typer!* And please—can't you give us more stories about lost Atlantis and such?"

From Overseas

Herbert V. Ross writes from London, England: "I find myself getting keener to get my monthly copy of WEIRD TALES as the years go by. Your magazine certainly provides a medium of escape into the bizarre, which is an excellent tonic in this harsh mundane workaday world; and is not the key of all entertainment today 'escape from reality'? I suppose this is not saying much for our vaunted civilization. Clark Ashton Smith's *The Death of Ilalotha* was a very fine piece of work. Smith is a true artist of words, and I hope we shall have many more of his stories, and translations of Baudelaire. Mr. Smith, you're a genius, you're number one, but why will you dwell on the horror instead of on the exotic and beautiful? *The Death of Ilalotha* combined the horrible and the beautiful to an admirable degree; that's what made it so outstanding. After all, it was a great weird tale (I have preserved it), but you must admit that the basic subject matter was, well, rather horrible. It was only your great word-artistry which disguised it. Think how much more you could do if you *started* with beauty. More power to your elbow, Clark! And I say again it was a great artistic work. I see that you are going to give us Seabury Quinn every month. That's fine. It will seem like old times. I can think of no other author who is so consistently good as Quinn. His powers rival Clark Ashton Smith's, his local color is very real, and his contribution is always a real weird tale. Among his recent best were *Strange Interval, Globe of Memories, Satan's Palimpsest, Pledged to the Dead* (I was quite in love with little Julie, Mr. Quinn, until I found out she was one of those vampire things) and *Living Buddhess.* Great work, Mr. Quinn. Lovecraft's *The Shunned House* was a great work. The build-up was the work of a master hand. I am convinced his reputation will grow, and leave Poe far behind. It is too bad he is gone from our midst. . . . Let's hear more from Clifford Ball. It is obvious that he has reincarnated Conan, but it was to be expected that after the following the barbarian had, somebody would do it. I don't see anybody better fitted to do it than Ball, so let him carry on."

A High-Class Magazine

Ralph Rayburn Phillips writes from Portland, Oregon: "A constant reader of WEIRD TALES, I began with the very first issue and I own a copy of almost every issue published. It is my favorite magazine and I am a truly appreciative reader, critical also, for I have been for many years a student of psychical research, occultism and Eastern philosophy. Accept my thanks for giving us this very high-class magazine. . . . I enjoy ghost stories, never tire of them, also Egyptian stories (Robert Bloch's are fine). *The Last Pharaoh* by Thomas P. Kelley looks extra good, though I haven't read it yet. *The Sea Witch* by Nictzin Dyalhis is a beautiful and outstanding story. Virgil Finlay's art work is superb."

Finlay's Pictorializations

James O'Regan writes from Springfield, Missouri: "It seems that Virgil Finlay's splendid frontispieces have met with the approval of your readers. His illustration in

the March issue is a masterpiece. During the time Finlay has been with you he has placed a great many ghouls, vampires, apparitions, monsters and other assorted creatures on the pages of your publication. I was quite pleased with the March issue, especially after reading *The Thing on the Floor.* It is indeed a shuddery tale, and you may be sure I did some quaking and quivering while reading the story. It provided quite a spine-chilling session. The late Robert E. Howard's verse, *The Poets,* is a very fine work, and how true it is! This is one of the best verses you have published in some time. However, I did not care greatly for the ending of *The Hairy Ones Shall Dance.* The earlier chapters seemed much better, for some reason.. I, for one, do not relish a story with a practical ending. So many tales of the like are published, in which some fearful fiend roams at night, slashing the throats of all who might meet him. The story goes on until the grisly monster has murdered a great number of people. And at the end of the story, the reader discovers that the fiend of the night is none other than a kind old gentleman with a beard, who lived on the corner."

Rebuttal

Clifford Ball, author of *The Thief of Forthe* and *The Goddess Awakes,* writes: "In replying to Mr. H. Sivia's criticism in April's Eyrie about the time element in *The Goddess Awakes,* in which he reminds me that I should not allow a character living in the age I was describing to employ the term 'sadistic,' I must perforce rise for rebuttal. Mark time. Rebuttal follows. First, I have never dated a Rald story; consequently I agree the armored years of the infamous Marquis de Sade probably never contained naked white warriors. If they did, historians have considered them unworthy of notice. But then, I never quoted Rald as using English as a language or of even belonging to the Caucasian races, so can you be sure he *knew* of it, or them, at all? Some time ago another reader commented in the Eyrie regarding the Irish accent used by my characters. It left me slightly bewildered. Has WT suddenly given tongue? In translating, the narrator must use the verb or adjective which describes accurately; hence, one might say an Egyptian king was murdered and have the members of his retinue believe you

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were praising the glory of a deceased Pharaoh. But I welcomed the criticism as a compliment because your interest in the story was strong enough to make you critical of it. So thanks—and incidentally, regarding the first part of your Eyrie letter, I agree with you V. Finlay is 'tops' as an illustrator."

A Sequel Requested

Dallas F. Pohlmann writes from Los Angeles: "I must be a slow thinker or something of the sort, for it has just occurred to me what an unusual issue the December, 1937, issue was. To begin with, the cover is the most outstanding in the past five years. That is not just another guess, but I have been looking over my back numbers and I have found that that is so. Secondly, the mysterious rendering by Virgil Finlay is not to be overlooked. Next is the real reason for this letter: *The Sea Witch* by Nictzin Dyalhis. I have been reading WEIRD TALES for over seven years and in all that time I have not written to the Eyrie. But after thinking over a story like the above I have to write and tell you that you *must* have Dyalhis write a sequel. The story is not complete. What I mean is that the author leaves an opening for a sequel. On page 664, third paragraph, the Sea-Witch asks John Craig if he loves her. He swears he does and she says 'Then in a day to come you shall take me—I swear it!' So the author has left himself a perfect opening. I won't sleep until I see that a sequel is on its way."

Flabbergasted and Dazzled

Warren J. Oswald writes from Fort Davis, Canal Zone: "Inasmuch as I have read your publication for some years, and have never before written you, I think it is time I broke silence—and at a most propitious time, it seems. That latest issue (March) is something to crow about! Of course, our friend Jules de Grandin takes the cake in another grand story. *Beyond the Wall of Sleep* wasn't far behind it, though. And to say the least, Mrs. Brundage's covers have improved splendidly in the past few months. Is that the result of competition, lady? Of Virgil Finlay, like the others, I have nothing to say. In other words, I am simply flabbergasted, dazzled by each succeeding illustration, wondering how much further he can go and still be better with each one. I believe the best one, though, is the character portrait illustrating *Dread Summons,* in the November issue. And the same one carried several fine stories; namely, *Quest of the Starstone,* and the initial installment of *The Voyage of the Neutralia.* And for each one, Finlay came through with his exquisite headings. I especially liked that little verse that N.W. sang with homesickness in his voice. I give your magazine a boost whenever I can (and I'm not looking for a laurel wreath; I just like it so much that I think a lot of other people would, too). Here on the post, it's hard to find good magazines. I used to have to go down to Colon to buy each issue, but got disgusted, and subscribed for a year. I was missing too many issues; they sell so darn fast here. Then I got the librarian interested enough to subscribe, and also the post exchange. And the copies they get sell like hot-cakes, or more so. Please keep Miss Hemken's letters going in the Eyrie. I get a big kick out of her style. In the meantime, you can count me as one of your most enthusiastic fans. Many happy returns of the sixteenth year."

February and March Issues

C. H. Chandler writes from Wooster, Ohio: "I wish I had time and opportunity to write a letter every month, just to 'review,' as it were, each issue, telling just what I liked and didn't like and why. But that being impossible, this will have to cover several issues, and not very thoroughly. (Perhaps the perspective gained by waiting will improve this—hope so.) When I think of last November's issue, one story stands out vividly in my memory, to the exclusion of all others. That story was *The Quest of the Starstone.* It has been a long time since anything quite equalling that has appeared in your pages; stories of that quality are rare anywhere. It combined ingenious plot with 'living' characters; it showed painstaking work (no half-baked, dashed-off formula-writing), as well as brilliant imaginative expression. With all due respect to Mr. Kraft's opinion, to which he is fully entitled, I congratulate you on that story, and trust other readers will do the same. Virgil Finlay's illustration for *Quest of the Starstone* was a masterpiece, as was also his drawing for *Dread Summons.* (If I started enumerating the Finlay illustrations that I

liked, I would fill many pages, so I'll let it go at that.) Miss Hemken said a mouthful in remarking on *The Witch's Mark*. I can't add anything to that—truly a discerning criticism. Now the story *Roads* is one I *could* say a great deal about, all of it exceedingly complimentary; but as most of it has been said already I'll content myself with calling it strikingly unusual and most refreshing. The more stories of that character, the better. The other outstanding story in that issue was *The Light Was Green*. February issue: *Frozen Beauty* and *The Goddess Awakes* were very fine, but what really packed a wallop was *The Diary of Alonzo Typer!* Honest, I haven't read a yarn with so much 'yoomph' in ages! It really gave one the creeps—and the details of finding all these terrifying—and familiar—manuscripts, faces, and the like in the house, as well as the suspense and minute description of the 'spooks,' all gave an atmosphere of waiting doom which was unsurpassed by any other story in the issue. Author Lumley has handled the diary device in a masterly fashion, too—so often stories written in that way are colorless or stiff. *World's End* is one of the few—the very few—plausible time-travel stories which I have ever read. It is remarkable for this fact alone, but being also well-written, it is outstanding among its kind. *The Ghosts at Haddon-le-Green* was really a rib-tickler, and a welcome respite from the spine-ticklers. March: *Incense of Abomination* I consider Quinn's best since *Roads*. Don't see how that fellow can turn out such consistently good work, yet there it is, and what with a top-notcher every so often, it makes him a real addition to the magazine. I've often wondered when one of these authors would get around to describing a Black Mass, instead of merely mentioning it and then avoiding anything more direct. Quinn did a good job, and the ceremony he described was as 'authentic' (if that adjective may be applied) as they come. I compared it with descriptions contained in several very respectable books on demonology in the college library here, and it tallies in practically every respect. *The Thing on the Floor* was another swell yarn, and a powerful one. But *Dreadful Sleep*, or its first installment, was about the best in the issue—I hope it keeps up as well, or better! Gosh—fan-

NEXT MONTH

FORTUNE'S FOOLS

By SEABURY QUINN

A THRILLING story out of the Dark Ages—a weird story of wolves that were men and men that were wolves—a tale of a medieval man-at-arms from Provence, and a dancing-girl from the Eastern emperor's slave-pens at Byzantium, who were indeed Fortune's fools.

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tastic!—but beautifully so. *The Girl from Samarcand* is one swell argument for reprints—wonder what in heck inspired the author—must have been something hefty!"

About Our Authors

Anthony Thom writes from San Francisco: "May I comment briefly on some of your authors? Seabury Quinn maintains a standard. He never strikes a height or a pit. Always entertaining, never disappointing, never enthralling. Dependable, and so to be commended and liked. Clifford Ball picks up the pen that Howard dropped and uses it not quite so well. Kuttner does something tops once in a while and once in a while something to be blushed at—examples of both types: *I, the Vampire* and *World's End*. C. L. Moore does fine work always. So far as I am concerned she is your best writer. Pity she has an independent income or whatever it is that compels her to write so seldom."

Concise Comments

Franklyn Brady writes from Beverly Hills, California: "What WEIRD TALES needs most is more 'lost continent' tales. Please cut down on the nudes, and make your covers as weird as the inside of the magazine."

Gerry Turner writes from Columbus, Ohio: "*Death Is a Temporary Indisposition* is beautifully written and singularly well translated. It is one of the too few tales that have not suffered by the change."

N. V. Kupias writes from New York City: "I have read WT for several years and I wish to state that I have never read a better magazine. While other magazines have lost their interest, WT remains the best on the market. I always enjoy most the shorter stories, as in the April edition *The House of Ecstasy* by Ralph Milne Farley and *The Devil Deals* by Carl Jacobi."

Most Popular Story

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? If you have any comments to make, please address them to the Eyrie, WEIRD TALES, 840 N. Michigan Avenue, Chicago. The most popular story in the April issue, as shown by your letters and votes, was Clark Ashton Smith's weird fantasy, *The Garden of Adompha*.

MY FAVORITE STORIES IN THE JUNE WEIRD TALES ARE:

Story	Remarks
(1) ----------	----------
(2) ----------	----------
(3) ----------	----------

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W. T.—8

COMING NEXT MONTH

IN A niche in the wall Elak saw the head. The shock of it turned him cold with amazement. A bodiless head, set upright on a golden pedestal within a little alcove—its cheeks sunken, hair lank and disheveled—but eyes bright with incredible life! The pallid lips of the horror writhed and twisted, and from them came a high skirling cry of warning.

"Zend! Zend! A stranger walks your——"

Elak's rapier flew. There was scarcely any blood. He dragged the blade from the eye-socket, whispering prayers to all the gods and goddesses he could remember. The lean jaw dropped, and a blackened and swollen tongue lolled from between the teeth. A red, shrunken eyelid dropped over the eye Elak had not pierced.

There was no sound save for Elak's hastened breathing. He eyed the monstrous thing in the alcove, and then, confident that it was no longer a menace, lengthened his steps up the passage. Had Zend heard the warning of his sentinel? If so, danger lurked all about him.

A silver curtain slashed with a black pattern hung across the corridor. Elak parted it, and, watching, he froze in every muscle.

A dwarf, no more than four feet tall, with a disproportionately large head and a gray, wrinkled skin, was trotting briskly toward him. From the tales he had heard Elak imagined the dwarf to be Zend. Behind the wizard strode a half-naked giant, who carried over his shoulder the limp form of a girl. Elak spun about, realizing that he had delayed too long. Zend was parting the silver curtain as Elak raced back down the corridor.

At his side a black rectangle loomed—a passage he had overlooked, apparently, when he had passed it before. He sprang into its shielding darkness. When Zend passed he would strike down the wizard and take his chances with the giant. Remembering the smooth hard muscles that had rippled under the dead-white skin of the man, Elak was not so sure that his chances would be worth much. He realized now that the giant had seemed familiar.

Then he knew. Two days ago he had seen a man—a condemned criminal—beheaded in the temple of Poseidon. There could be no mistake. The giant was the same man, brought back to life by Zend's evil necromancy! . . .

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By Henry Kuttner

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The weird story of a heartless criminal lawyer who nevertheless wanted to acquit his own murderer.

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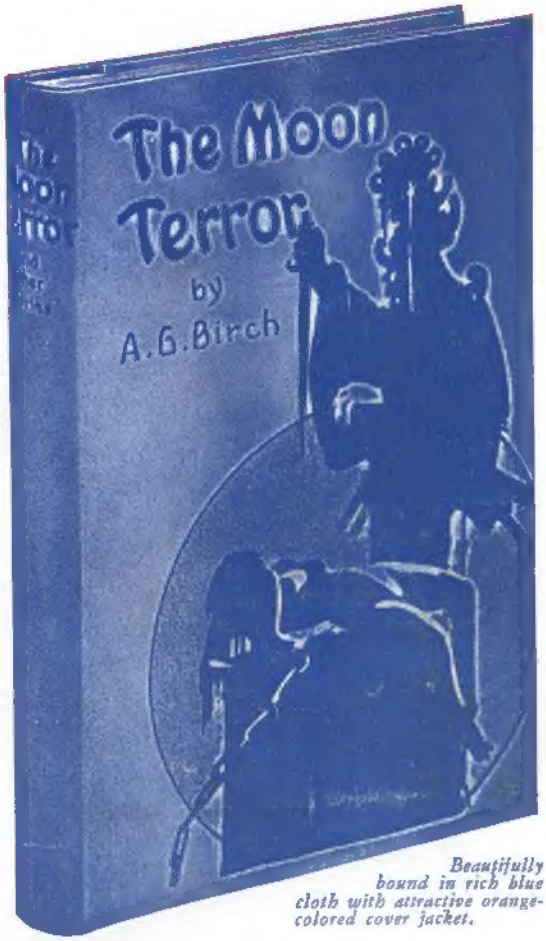

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